

**What is Family Support Work?**

**A Case Study Within The Context of  
One Local Authority in Scotland.**

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# Chapter One

## Setting the Context of the Study

### Introduction

This chapter outlines the context for this study and my interest in the subject. The thesis investigates the development of family support within one local authority in Scotland and shows that it has emerged from a complex interplay of governmental, philosophical, policy and practice change. The chapter has four sections:

- Section One: discusses why this subject interested me and why I thought it merited further investigation
- Section Two: discusses the emergence of family support work within Pentesk Council and the complexity of the policy and structures in which the development took place
- Section Three: outlines the chapter headings i.e. literature review; methods; reflections on fieldwork etc and highlights area of importance within these chapters
- Section Four: concludes that the development of family support work within Pentesk Council emerged from a complex array of philosophical, theoretical, policy and practice change which left family support work without a shared agreed definition.

### Section One: Why the Interest in this Subject?

*'Mary, what are we supposed to be doing with these families, it seems that every other agency can say no and we are left to get on with it. Who protects us when the shit hits the fan? This is the main reason why I am leaving; no-one seems to care about us.'*

(Family Support Worker, July 2005)

The above quotation was taken from an exit interview with a family support worker employed in my team for less than a year. My concern was that this was the third family support worker to leave with less than a year's service within a three year period. Whilst some may argue that this might have been down to a range of issues, this lack of staff retention was evident throughout our local authority, with family support workers staying in post for relatively short periods of time between six months to a year. This concerned me because these staff members had come into a newly created post, which offered them relatively well-paid permanent contracts and opportunity to utilise their skills and expertise within newly formed integrated children's services teams. The family support worker post should have offered the opportunity to work with children and families in a holistic way, overcoming real or imaginary professional barriers to integrated working. Yet it emerged in exit interviews with staff and through discussion with other managers that there were a number of issues relating to the family support worker post which appeared to have a direct impact on staff retention. These included:

- a lack of shared understanding within the authority of the role of family support work
- issues regarding the lack of 'professional respect' by other staff for the skills and expertise of family support workers in this area of work
- the lack of progression opportunities for family support workers

Staff indicated that these areas had a direct impact on their work and left them feeling 'vulnerable' within the authority. I decided that this area really interested me both as a manager working in the area of integrated services developing the role of family support work within a small local authority in Scotland and as a student undertaking further study in an academic course. Michael Bassey (2003, 112) advises that he undertakes research which excites or concerns him and because he has a 'fire in his belly' about it. This to me was my 'fire in the belly' project because I was angry that the authority was losing very good committed staff who were skilled at working holistically with children and families yet, they felt their skills were not

valued within the authority. I decided that a systematic exploration of the development of the family support work role within Pentesk Council would highlight some of the difficulties and tensions within the authority.

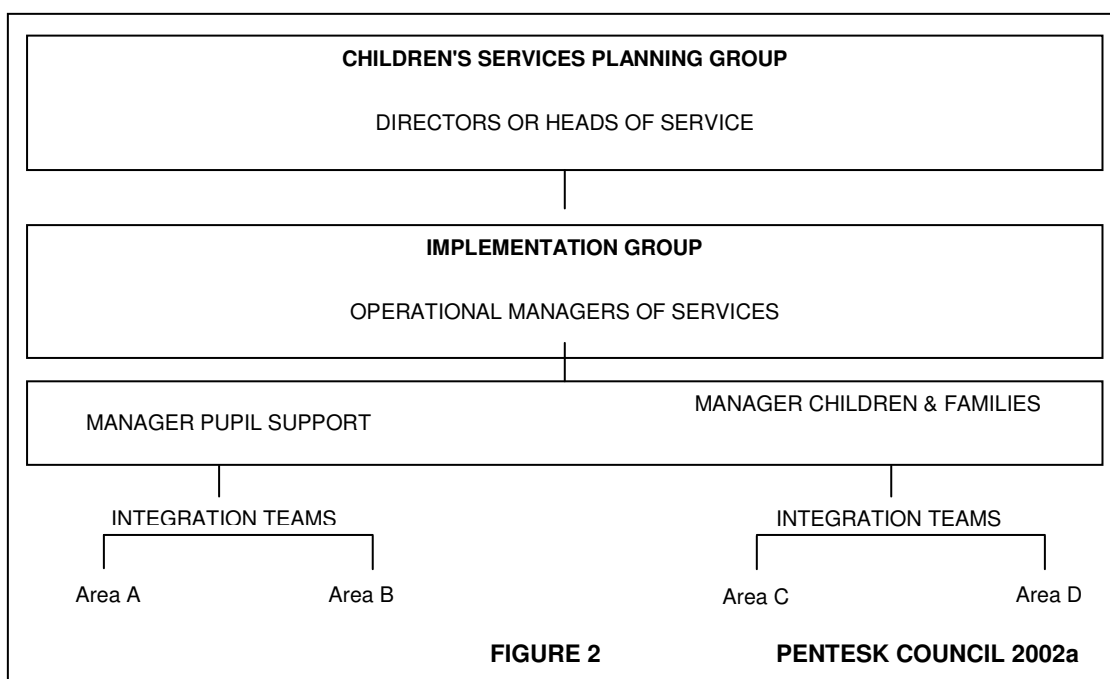
I also believe that research in this area of work would resonate with operational staff, local authorities and policy makers in Scotland, as the country has undergone massive changes in welfare delivery since New Labour came to power, where local authorities and health providers were now expected to deliver joined-up working through service integration (Riddell and Tett, 2004; Roaf, 2002). This has had an impact on staffing with 'new' types of post being created i.e. family support workers, home-school link workers, working for family's workers etc (Anning et al 2006; Dolan et al 2006). My interest lay in how these 'new' posts articulated into current provision and where staff fit, in relation to the existing professions delivering services i.e. social work, health visiting, community education etc. It was anticipated that through exploring one specific example of 'new' provision that this study would contribute to the body of literature regarding the role of family support work in welfare delivery and make a contribution to the knowledge and understanding of how these 'new' posts impact on staff employed in them.

## **Section Two: Emergence of Family Support Work within Pentesk Council**

The For Scotland's Children report (Scottish Executive, 2001a) outlined that whilst a lot of children received a lot of support from welfare providers, the service they received was largely uncoordinated. The outcome of this report was that local authorities had to change the way they delivered services and become more 'integrated' in the supports they offered. My employer made a successful bid to the Scottish Executive 'Change Fund'. This funding enabled the local authority to restructure their children's services delivery across four Integration Teams (Pentesk Council 2002a).

Each team consists of an integration manager and ‘core’ team members i.e. family support worker, assistant family support worker, education welfare officer, administrative assistant and homelink teacher, managed by the integration manager. Funding for this proposal came from Integrated Community Schools Budget (60%) managed by Education, and Children’s Change Fund (40%) managed by Social Work. The day-to-day management of the four Integration teams was carried out by Education Division managing two teams and Social Work division managing the other two (Pentesk Council 2002a). This study shows that there were competing demands within the management structure which led to tensions between the services which ultimately impacted on the development of family support work.

***Figure 1 Visual Representation of Strategic Management of Teams***



Within the bid to the Scottish Executive was a reference to the creation of a new service ‘Family Support Work’ (FSW) and this service was designed to work with families who were not considered to be ‘at risk’ i.e. families who required child protection measures by social work (Pentesk Council, 2001). The role of FSW has evolved since the bid and it covers a range of activities across the authority i.e. groupwork, one to one work, parenting work etc. There are two ‘levels’ of staff involved in family support work: the family support worker who has degree level

qualifications and post graduate qualifications: and the assistant family support worker who has HNC level qualifications. All of the above staff have relevant qualifications in health, education or social work.

In this study my aim was to clarify the role of family support work within the context of the local authority I am employed by. It was anticipated that during the course of this research that I would be able to explore issues relating to the development of the family support work role with a range of stakeholders involved in defining the role within this authority with a view to improving staff retention. These include strategic and operational managers, family support workers, operational staff from other agencies and children and families. However, the thesis outlines the difficulties encountered during the course of this study which included:

- A key stakeholder not engaging in the study
- Lack of engagement of families in the study
- Changes and shifts taking place within the authority
- Policy change within the authority
- Governmental change.

These areas have all impacted on this study and throughout this thesis the reader will see the where each of these difficulties has influenced this research. The effect of some of these difficulties is so far reaching that my conclusion is not solely about clarifying the role of family support work within Pentesk Council to improve retention but questions if it will still be part of welfare delivery due to funding constraints.

### **Section Three: Outline of Thesis Chapters**

This thesis has seven chapters which outline the key factors regarding the development of family support work within Pentesk Council. This chapter (chapter

one) discusses why I was interested in this topic and gives an outline of the study.

## *Chapter Two: Literature Review*

This chapter discusses that family support work emerged from complex mix of philosophical, governmental, policy and practice change. This complex mix highlighted that family support work developed from a number of 'shifts' in theory, policy and practice agendas. However due to the complexity of the issues discussed there was not a clear view of what family support was and what philosophical or theoretical approaches underpinned its development.

## *Chapter Three: Research Methods*

This chapter discusses how I carried out this research and what influenced my choice of methods. This study was undertaken through a complex interplay of my epistemological and ontological stances coupled with more pragmatic influences such as availability of respondents, available time to undertake the research, data processing costs etc. This chapter shows the reader how I intended to carry out this research and the decisions that influenced these choices. This is argued to be part of the reflexive process where the researcher takes nothing for granted and that the procedures for undertaking research are systematic and robust (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2005). However, despite being clear about my methods the next chapter (chapter four) highlights difficulties I encountered whilst undertaking this research.

## *Chapter Four: Reflections on Fieldwork*

Chapter four discusses my reflection on the fieldwork and the 'messiness' of undertaking research and concluded that research is complex and fraught with difficulties. This included: the changing landscape of this study; problems encountered during the fieldwork; difficulties in the interview process; difficulties in offering and gaining interview feedback from the respondents to ensure that the study met ethical standards. The chapter discusses the process of turning all of the

information I collected during the fieldwork into 'data' for the study. The study concludes that fieldwork is a complex and laborious process with many pitfalls along the way. Yet it is this complexity that makes the study exciting. This chapter highlights that the fieldwork has taken place within a moving framework of structural, policy and practice change.

### *Chapter Five: Data Analysis*

Chapter five discusses my data analysis through 'Second Order Principles' (Knight, 2002; Munn 2006) where I explored the key themes which emerged from the data in more detail to try to understand what was happening and why people held particular views (Cohen et al, 2004). The key themes which emerged were;

- Tensions between early intervention and higher tariff work: the lack of clarity of the terminology which influenced the development of family support work
- Family support work as a refocusing of welfare delivery: an exploration of issues that helped or hindered this process
- Skills and qualifications of family support workers: an exploration of the perception that family support workers had low-level skills
- Lack of parental involvement in the development of family support work and how they experience the service which has competing demands made of it.

The chapter concludes that the development of family support work within Pentesk Council was never clearly defined and fell into a political arena where different services fought against each other and had vested interests in family support work succeeding or failing. The lack of clear profile left family support work vulnerable to sudden change without clear strategic direction.

## *Chapter Six: Discussion*

Chapter six draws this study together and reviews where both national and local policy is at present. I also discuss some possible options for the continued development of family support work within Pentesk Council through GIRFEC agenda (Scottish Executive, 2005a), the adoption of 'social support' theory (Dolan et al, 2006) and two possibilities for 'professionalising' family support work through the Standard for Childhood Practice (Scottish Government, 2007b) and through the adoption of a 'social pedagogy model of education and training of staff' (Cameron, 2006). The chapter concluded that whilst there are real opportunities to further develop and consolidate the family support worker role within Pentesk Council there are also real threats.

The authority is undergoing a review of council employees through the 'Single Status' agreement (Pentesk Council, 2008e) and at present I am unsure where family support work will be placed. As discussed throughout this thesis family support work lacked a clear agreed role within the authority and may be vulnerable again within this process. Coupled with this, the authority is undergoing a financial review due to budget overspends and Directors have been advised to make cuts in department spending, so again it may be that family support work within in the authority will become a victim to budget cuts.

## *Chapter Seven: Conclusion to the Study*

Chapter seven concludes that family support work within Pentesk Council has emerged from a complex interplay of governmental, policy and practice change. The study also showed that family support work was never clearly defined and this has impacted on the development of it leaving it vulnerable to change. The study discusses possible options to define the role of family support work within Pentesk Council and opportunities to 'professionalise' this service and other 'non traditional' welfare providers i.e. early years workers, children's workers, home school workers etc through the Standard for Childhood Practice (Scottish Government, 2007b) or



through the social pedagogy model (Cameron, 2006). This at least opens up exciting opportunities for staff and it may be that they would feel less vulnerable by being part of a community of practice. However, the study also highlights threats to the development of family support work within Pentesk Council through the new single status agreement and budget restrictions. The study concludes that the original aim of this thesis was to contribute to discussions to help clarify of the role of family support work within the authority. It was anticipated that this would help improve staff retention and ultimately improve the service we offered our children and families. However at the end of this thesis it is not simply staff retention that I am concerned about, I am also unsure if this small service (without a clear remit or role) will actually survive within Pentesk Council. However, whilst I may appear pessimistic regarding the family support work role at a local level, the study also discusses possibilities for the development of family support work in a wider context over the next five to ten years across the areas of practice, policy, theory and empirical research.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review: The Emergence of Family Support**

#### **Introduction**

This study explored the emergence of family support work as welfare delivery in the U.K. and drew on literature from Britain, Ireland, America, Australia and New Zealand. The literature review section enabled this thesis to make connections with previous studies, concepts and ideas. It aims to set out key debates, issues and gaps within previous research and to define the key research questions (Knight, 2002; Hart, 2005). This chapter was developed through a fluid process that began during the taught phase of the EdD and continued throughout the study. It was very organic in nature, influenced by contemporaneous events (i.e. the emergence of workforce development policy, the authority response to the Child Protection report etc) and employed to illuminate and clarify issues raised by the data collection phase of the thesis. This can be characterised as a ‘snowballing’ approach to the literature, i.e. the literature was chosen for its connection to themes that emerged in the thesis. ‘Snowballing’ is usually associated with research methods and small data samples, however in this chapter the word ‘snowballing’ is utilised to describe how the chapter gathered information on the development of family support work from a range of sources including: policy documents, research bibliographies, research studies, etc. ( Knight, 2002, Hart, 2005, Silverman, 2004).

The adoption of this ‘snowballing’ approach enabled this chapter to grow by adding only relevant information which enhanced the study rather than swamping the study with a review of all the literature in this and connected fields. This chapter has five sections which outline the key issues identified from the literature in detail:

- Section One: explored the discourses relating to the emergence of family support work within modern welfare delivery. This section discussed the political changes and the move from the ‘moral underclass’ discourses of

the Conservative Government to the ‘social integrationist’ discourses of the ‘New’ Labour Government. The section also explored the rhetoric of participation and partnership working between the state, parents, children and young people and concludes that this is a much contested area.

- Section two: followed on from this with an exploration of the changes in the concept of the ‘family’ and suggests that despite the diversity of ‘the family’ and that role being strained that most children live within a family setting. However, that family setting varies greatly and this section discussed the implications of this for staff involved in family support work.
- Section three: discussed the emergence of family support work within modern welfare delivery and I concluded from the literature that the roots of this change lie in the 1989 Children Act in England and Wales and the Children Act (1995) in Scotland which placed duties on local authorities and health providers to provide services for ‘children in need’. ‘Family Support’ as a term emerged around this time, but the literature surrounding family support work is unclear and does not give a concise view of what family support is or what it does.
- Section four: explored a continuum of volunteers and staff involved in delivering family support work and indicated that family support work was part of both the Conservative and New Labour’s reform of public services. The implications of this are explored through a discussion of professionalism and whether family support work is viewed as a new or emerging profession or as part of the de-professionalisation of public services.
- Section five concluded by setting out the key issues within the review of the literature and the implications of these issues for this thesis.

This literature review began by examining the terms ‘family support’, ‘family support work’ and ‘family support worker’, and traced the development of family

support work from the late 1970s to present day with a view to illuminating if there was a shared conceptual view of what family support work is. It was clear from initial readings of the literature that family support work emerged from a very complex mix of political, philosophical and social change. The ‘snowballing’ approach to this chapter enabled these initial readings to be followed up with research of literature in other areas including: political change, policy change, welfare change, perceived changes in the role of the family etc.

This process generated a large amount of information which was made manageable through a process of ‘progressive narrowing’ (Hart, 2005). Walcott (in Silverman, 2004, 230) advises that this is a critical part of the research process where the researcher needs to avoid ‘... lumping literature into a chapter which is unconnected to the rest of the study’. From this narrowing of the literature this chapter identifies four key areas which impacted on the development of family support work:

- Political and philosophical change
- Changes in the concept of the family
- Change in welfare delivery from reactive to proactive services
- Welfare reform - the de-professionalisation/re-professionalisation debate

I argue that these four key areas: informed the data collection stage of the research; were integral to the study; gave credence to my thinking and enabled me to form well thought out conclusions later on in the study (Hart, 2005; Silverman, 2004). From this very complex process of information gathering and information reduction I was able to identify six key questions pertaining to the development of Family Support Work within Pentesk Council:

- What philosophical and theoretical approaches underpinned the development of family support work?
- Was there an understanding of the changing role of the family?
- Was there an agreed definition for the role of family support work?

- ‘What’ was being delivered under the heading of family support work?
- Was there an agreed definition of ‘who’ provides family support work?
- Is Family Support Work a new or emerging profession within welfare delivery?

It was anticipated in exploring these areas within this research that it would contribute to defining the role and expectations of family support work within Pentesk Council. I also anticipated that this might aid staff retention and improve children and families experience of family support services.

## **Section One: Changes in Political and Theoretical Discourse**

In order to gain a better understanding of the development of ‘family support’ within welfare services in Britain this section illuminated key arguments and ‘shifts’ in policy concerning the development of welfare delivery in the U.K. and Scotland over the last twenty years. I believe that this helped set the changes and the main drivers for this change within a theoretical, legislative and policy context which will assist the reader and me to understand both the political landscape and the desire for change within welfare services delivery. This section discussed both Conservative and Labour Government’s policies relating to welfare change and discussed the impact this has had on both services users and those delivering services. It was suggested by a number of writers (Farnham and Horton, 1996; Ling, 2000; Paterson, 1994; Pierson, 2004) that Britain had undergone huge change in welfare provision in the latter part of the twentieth century and this chapter concluded that there had been a shift in emphasis from the ‘moral underclass’ discourses of the 1980s to the ‘social integrationist’ discourses of the New Labour Government elected in 1997 (Davis, 2006; Levitas, 2005; Murray, 1990).

Due to the economic crisis of the 1970s, the Conservative Government undertook a whole range of policy change during the late 1970s and 80s, which was designed to strengthen economic and industrial policy with an emphasis on a strong state

(Farnham and Horton, 1996; Pierson, 2004). This was coupled with a move away from the large bureaucratic delivery of services to the more 'market' lead approaches which were argued to be more 'person centred'. The market lead approaches promoted the perspective that the recipient of the service should have choice and flexibility in the service they received. Farnham and Horton (1996, 3) argued that 'markets became preferred to politics as a means of allocating resources and distributing welfare'. The Conservative view was that 'markets' offered personal freedom and that people would choose services, which closely met their own personal needs. The 'purchaser' of these services, i.e. parents choosing their child's school, or a patient being able to choose which hospital they attend, should be able to move their 'custom' between providers (Pierson, 2004, 157). It was argued that welfare should be understood 'not as state benefits, but as maximising economic progress and therefore overall wealth, by allowing markets to work their miracles' Giddens (2004, 13).

Within this change policy agenda the Conservative Government adopted a moral underclass 'blaming' approach to social exclusion. Discourses in this area related social exclusion to 'moral decline', which was argued to be a key contributor to poor parenting, poor educational achievement, unemployment and the breakdown of social ties. This moral underclass discourse blamed the individual and their families for their circumstances and for not taking up opportunities to self improve (Coles, 2000; Davis 2006; Levitas, 2005; Murray, 1990; Prout, 2000). I concluded that the moral underclass discourse ignored structural barriers such as race, gender, class, disability etc. I suggest that the Conservative view was about the individual and the individual family unit, opportunities to self improve were on offer, it was up to the individual to access these. However, when New Labour came to power in 1997, they adopted a 'social integrationist' agenda (Davis, 2006; Levitas 2006; Prout, 2000) which was another major shift in policy which had an impact on the development of family support work.

New Labour adopted 'third way', policies which changed welfare policy and delivery across the UK (Giddens, 2004; Levitas, 2005). It is argued that New Labour

appeared to have undergone an ideological change and moved away from the old notion of socialism based on collectivism, public ownership and state control to a 'social integrationist' approach (Davis, 2006; Levitas 2006; Prout, 2000). The social integrationist approach was argued to embrace new ideologies of community, social cohesion and social justice which would '... give everyone a chance, through education, training and work, to realise their full potential and build an inclusive and fair society and a competitive economy' (Smithers, 2001, 410). Alongside this, New Labour also embraced the Conservative idea of 'markets' and used this as a tool in the delivery of public services. Gordon Brown (2003, 266) stated that the 'challenge for New Labour is, while remaining true to our values and goals, to have the courage to affirm that markets are a means of advancing public interest'. So New Labour's 'Third Way' policies included the marketisation of services alongside social integrationist approaches.

Levitas (2005) suggested that the 'social integrationist' discourse defined excluded people as those prevented from accessing education, employment or services through circumstances within society. The focus of this work was to get people back into employment and New Labour affirmed their manifesto to reduce social exclusion by introducing a wide range of policies to support families to stay or become economically active. Within this agenda, New Labour also shifted the emphasis on the 'family' rather than the state in supporting children and families. They planned to reduce 'social exclusion' through supporting children and families with a range of policies designed to change the perception of welfare from '... a safety net cushioning economic failure into a trampoline for economic success' (Commission on Social Justice, in Pierson, 2004, 103).

I suggest that like many other terms discussed in this paper, there is a lack of consensus on what the term 'social exclusion' meant because it can range from the effect of poverty, lack of participation in social processes and dealing with 'deviant' behaviour (Davis, 2006; Mayall, 2006). The State no longer viewed itself as a main welfare provider for individual children and families, their support came through a range of policies and initiatives designed to help families help themselves i.e.

parental leave directive, child care tax credit and working families tax credit etc (Gillies, 2005; Glass 1999) It is suggested that New Labour had ‘... abandoned the redistribute approach to poverty in favour of an enabling approach’ (Roberts, 2001, 55). In this approach the government provided the opportunities described above, regarding support, but the emphasis on all of the Government policies aimed at families is that the parents, whether living within the family home, are responsible for providing for their families.

Whilst these policies were argued to be very positive there was concern that the social integrationist discourse not only defined those unable to access work as being ‘deficient’ it also overlooked the fact that a society with full employment would still involve various forms of exclusion (Davis, 2006; Levitas 2006; Mannion, 2005; Prout, 2000). I suggest that that within this agenda there were remnants of ‘blaming culture’ of the previous administration and concluded from the literature that ‘moral order’ had become a major issue for the Labour Government. Issues such as ‘problem youth’, ‘school truancy’ and ‘school exclusion’ have lead to overt policy aimed at families to emphasise parental responsibilities. Power (2001, 25) argued that ‘the provision of parenting classes, family counselling and behaviour management to address educational underachievement and social exclusion, leaves little doubt that the source of disadvantage lies within the family’.

I suggest that neither the ‘moral underclass’ discourse of the Conservative Government nor the ‘social integrationist’ approaches of the New Labour Government have taken into account the diversity of modern society. I argue that within the moral underclass and social integrationist discourses lies a lack of understanding of those who are excluded from society and a culture of ‘blame’. Writers such as Coles (2000); Davis (2006); Levitas (2005); Prout (2000), suggest that a ‘social solidarity’ discourse would be a more productive way forward in that it highlights the distinction between individual and societal barriers to inclusion. The emphasis in this approach is on strong familial ties coupled with good local community supports and partnership working between families and welfare agencies.



It appeared to me that it was in this area that family support work would bring most benefit.

This section has highlighted the various political and philosophical changes that have taken place over the last twenty years and this study explored the impact of these on the development of policies within Pentesk Council. The study sought to explore how the moral underclass/social integrationist discourse impacted on the refocusing of services within the authority. Was it a refocusing to meet the needs of children and families or did it individualise family problems? This area is explored further in chapter five however; the following section explores the issue of partnership and participation of children, young people and their parents in policy making and welfare delivery.

### **Participation of Children, Young People and Parents/Carers in Welfare Delivery**

Another key shift in welfare policy over the last twenty years has been the inclusion of service users in the development and delivery of welfare services. These participatory approaches were viewed as a sharing of ideas and giving those who were socially excluded more say in the services that affected their lives. I discussed above that social exclusion was linked to poverty, disadvantage and poor social networks that impacted on the individual's ability to influence events in their lives (Hill et al, 2004; Pierson, 2001). This section discussed participation and partnership and concluded that participation and partnership working between the state and the individual is a contested concept and disregarded the imbalance of the power relationships between those who set the agenda and those who participate in the agenda.

The rhetoric of governmental policy over the last twenty years has been that services should include the views of service users in the decision making process (Levitas, 2005; Nixon, 2002; Pierson, 2004). This policy sought to strengthen the links between the state and the parent through involvement of parents in the decision

making process. This participatory approach, usually through parents/carers, is viewed as working in 'partnership' with schools, medical services, social work services etc. The essential ingredient of such partnerships was that there is a 'common bond' drawing these partnerships together (Mordaunt, 2001). Those delivering the services were viewed as having the needs of the service users at the centre of their planning. Those receiving the services were viewed as customers or consumers in welfare services through the marketisation agenda (discussed earlier in this chapter). It appeared from the literature that participation is regarded as being a 'good thing' and has a role in challenging social exclusion (Davis and Edwards, 2004).

In Scotland, it was argued that the new devolved Scottish Government offered opportunities for a more open and participatory approach to policy making (Lynch, 2001). The New Community Schools Projects (NCS) in Scotland took the participation agenda forward by indicating that parents should be partners and stakeholders in the development of services (Scottish Office, 1998) Writers such as Ryan (2000) and Mordaunt (2001) discuss the merits of such partnership working where the views of parents are valued and indicate that this has led to a better understanding between families and education services about the needs of the individual, families and communities. One example of this approach was the replacement of School Boards with 'Parent Forums' to encourage greater participation between local authorities, schools and parents. This legislation sought to involve parents in decision-making on educational issues and placed a 'duty' on local authorities to promote parental involvement (Scottish Executive, 2006d). The legislation took forward the view that the Scottish Government was actively seeking parental involvement in their child's education rather than the more traditional view of parents' involvement through Parent/Teacher Associations (PTAs) and School Boards. Ryan (*ibid*) writes:

*‘When the school and families work together in partnership, the benefits that accrue are reciprocal and complementary. By working closely with families, schools can accomplish the task of developing and enhancing children’s learning more effectively’. In turn, parents who feel supported in their involvement in schools gain confidence, self esteem and the ability to participate and thus becoming more effective in their engagements with their children’.*

Ryan (2000, 182)

Whilst the writers above, reported positive aspects of parents being viewed as partners in their child’s education. Other writers such as Bastiani (1993); Hegarty (1993); Wolfendale and Bastiani (2000) write that the ideology of parents as partners is unsound due to the power imbalance between the parents and the professions and about what this ‘partnership’ meant. At one level, the partnership related to the individual child, their parent and their relationship with the school. On the other hand it also related to the lack of relationship where the parents and children are viewed as ‘deficit’ and the concept of ‘partnership’ ignored structural issues such as gender, poverty, poor housing, language barriers etc. Hatcher and Leblond (2001) argued:

*‘Whatever the rhetoric of partnership, their voices especially those of working class parents and ethnic minority communities, tend to be marginalised by exclusionary professionalist agendas, often sustained by deficient ideologies’.*

(Hatcher and Leblond, 2001, 55)

These writers did not indicate that parents felt like ‘partners’ in their child’s service planning and report that in many cases parents were treated with a lack of respect. They cited issues such as broken appointments; key changes in personnel; key staff not attending meetings etc., as issues that made them feel devalued as a contributor to their child’s care and welfare.

In addition to viewing the parents as partners, the Standards in Scotland’s Schools etc 2000 Education Act and the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989) both indicated that children’s views should be taken into account when decisions are being made *about* them (Marhall, 1997; Scottish Executive, 2000). Whilst this

legislation gave children and young people ‘rights’ it did not view the children and young people as ‘partners’ in the decision making process. Children’s rights are largely regulated by or through their parents/carers; it is the parents/carers who are responsible for ensuring their child is educated; it is the parents/carer who have the right to choose their child’s school and it is the parent/carer who can appeal their child’s exclusion from school. It appeared that whilst the rhetoric of participation of children and young people was recognised in policy this was not recognised in practice (Hill et al, 2004; Tisdall, 2001). Marshall (1997) argued that there had to be a balance between the right to participate and the need to protect children and young people and it appeared that children were viewed as passive recipients within the welfare state (Moss and Petrie, 2004).

However, the view of the ‘weak, and needy’ child is challenged by a number of writers (Clarke, et al, 2005; Davis and Hogan, 2003; Moss and Petrie, 2004). These writers discuss the importance of actively encouraging and including children and young people in all decisions made about them regarding individual care and wider policy development. They argue that many participatory opportunities are open to children and young people through activities such as youth councils, school councils, youth parliaments etc. However, these activities are criticised for being focused on adult democratic processes rather than meeting the needs of children and young people (Hill et al, 2004). Vincent (in Riddell, 2001) points out that whilst this level of participation is limited and ‘fragile’ at least it offers some opportunities to participate in the educational agenda.

## **Conclusion to Section One (chapter two)**

This section of the thesis has discussed key theoretical and philosophical shifts that have taken place over the last twenty years. These included:

- The ‘moral underclass’ discourse of the Conservative government
- The ‘social integrationist’ discourse of New Labour

- The ‘social inclusion’ agenda of New Labour
- Partnership working between policy makers and children and families

This section concluded that the emergence of family support has been informed by these key shifts. This study explored how these shifts impacted on policy development within Pentesk Council. A key aim of this study was to find out what philosophical approach underpinned the development of family support work and if it was about refocusing of services to meet the needs of children and families or whether it was about individualising the problems families face in contemporary Britain. The study also sought to find out if parents, children and young people felt they were active participants in the support they received and if they contributed to the development of family support work. Section two elaborated this further and discussed the changing concept of the ‘family’ within contemporary society and its relationship to the development of family support work

## **Section Two: The Changing Concept of the Family**

In addition to the political, theoretical and policy shifts discussed above, I suggest that there has also been a ‘shift’ in perception within society of the role and function of the ‘family’ and this section discusses this in more detail. In considering the concept of the ‘family’ I concluded from the literature that there appeared to be concern that ‘family’ was under considerable strain and that there is a perception of loss of ‘...stable enduring family structures’ (Pithouse et al 1998, 14). It was important to include this section in this study because I wanted to find out if policy makers, managers, and local staff had an awareness of this ‘shift’ in the perception of the family and how local policy and practice impacts on a family.

There is little doubt that the term ‘family’ means many things in contemporary society. Despite the complexity of variations of family, Rutherford (1998, 125) states that no-matter the family type one belongs to ‘members of families are likely to have persistent relationships involving emotional bonds – that is to say, they belong to a group of interconnected and interdependent people who have

psychologically meaningful interactions’. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) describes the family as;

*‘... the fundamental group in society and the natural environment for growth and well-being of all its members and particularly its children. As such, the family should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community’.*

UN Convention on Rights of the Child (1989, Appendix 1).

However, there are many views on what constitutes a ‘family’ and changes in society have generated a range of family types. Schaffer (1998, 311) suggests that ‘the family may be the first context in which the children learns about the social world ...’ Pithouse et al (1998, 17) emphasise that ‘good’ families are important to the state because they create ‘good citizens’ who instil ‘cultural, social, spiritual and moral values and support the ‘social emotional and material needs of family members’. Similarly Hill and Tisdall (1997, 66) state that ‘ ... the family is seen as uniquely suited for the upbringing of children, not only to meet their need for love and commitment but also to create stable citizens and foster social order’. Nevertheless there is no clear definition of what constitutes a family.

Williams (2004, 14) writes that ‘Families in the 2000s are characterised by diversity, continuity and change. There is a diversity of living arrangements for partnering and parenting although the majority of families with children are headed by a couple’. Wheal and Emson (2002, 9) describe how new reproductive techniques; gay parenting; reconstituted families and kinship care can be elements of new family types, but the reality is that children living with two parents is the norm closely followed by children being brought up in a single parent (usually mother) household. Roberts, (2001, 56) reports that ‘the Government insists that marriage and the traditional family provide ‘the most reliable framework for raising children’. However, it is also a reality that belonging to a traditional family might in fact be harmful to children.

Whilst the writers above are commenting on the more positive aspects of belonging to a family, this section discusses that equally belonging to a family might in fact be harmful to children. Pinkerton (2000) suggests that belonging to the family unit can be the source of difficulty for many children and families. He states that;

*'The safe haven of family life is recognised as the site of gender inequality, domestic violence, child abuse and exhausting power struggles between children and parents. Adolescent friendships become supply routes for drugs. Concern for the crisis of family life and the collapse of community may be enduring themes given a contemporary spin by more or less sensational media reporting, but as with any 'moral panic' at its root will be a reality ...'.*

Pinkerton (2000, 212)

Wasoff and Hill (2002, 172) echo these concerns by stating 'the family as the focus and unit of analysis can also mask diversity and power relations within and between families'. Utting (1995, 3) reports that in the last thirty years the family has undergone dramatic change with rising divorce rates and rising number of single parent households. He suggests that 'families are places where the risks of adversity can multiply for socially and emotionally disadvantaged children ...' Some families, usually women and children, face domestic abuse on a regular basis and many children are living with parents who are unable or even unwilling to meet their needs through mental health or drug and alcohol misuse (Pinkerton, 2000). Some families are also prevented from making adequate provision for their families due to living in poverty. Penn and Gough (2002) suggest that 30% of children living in the U.K are living in poverty and there can be little doubt that this has an impact on the family unit.

## **Conclusion to Section Two (chapter two)**

I concluded from the discourse on the 'family' that despite the difficulties families face, the majority of children lives within some form of 'family' unit, however diverse or dysfunctional. Within this discussion it must also be understood that living within a family structure may also be difficult or even dangerous for family

members. It is within this area that family support work takes place and the focus of contemporary policy is on the family unit. This has implications for the staff involved as family support workers. In this study I was looking for evidence that the local authority policy makers, managers of services and staff delivering the family support work services had an understanding of the changing role of the family and how policy and practice impacts on the families using the service. In section three I discuss the emergence of family support work from the complex political, theoretical and societal changes discussed in sections one and two above.

### **Section Three: Emergence of Family Support Work**

This section discusses the emergence of family support work and I concluded from the literature that family support work has its roots in the move from the reactive welfare approaches of the 1970s to more proactive approaches of the 80s and 90s, which has led to more diverse services to meet the needs of children and families. A complex mix of social and political change initiated this 'shift' in practice but I suggest that the main drivers for this change came through the Children Act (1989) in England and Wales and the Children Scotland Act (1995) in Scotland. These Acts updated previous legislation and were a direct response to societal change, welfare change and the 'catastrophic failure' of welfare services in relation to a number of high profile child abuse cases (Carpenter 1997; Leathard, 1997). One of the key terms identified in both Acts was that of 'children in need' which gave clear direction that a change in service provision was required by service providers including health, education and social services (Little 1999; Tisdall, 1997).

Millar (2006, 92) argued that this legislative change paved the way for a change in the way children's services were delivered, which 'struck a balance between child protection and the promotion of family life'. She further argued that 'the importance of the legislation was that for the first time specific services to support children in need and families in the community were named, such services included: advice, guidance and counselling; day care and family centres and home helps'. I suggest that this legislative change gave the strong message that working with 'children in



need' encompassed a wider understanding of 'need', which went beyond the traditional view of child protection and single service 'ownership' of children and families and delivery of services (Scottish Executive, 2001a; DfES, 2004).

However, some writers argued that the lack of clarity of the definition 'children in need' and the resources to meet that need were very limited which lead to a 'rationing mechanism' by local authorities (McGhee and Waterhouse, 2002; Tisdall, 1997). Some local authorities chose to narrowly define those 'in need' as 'children at risk from significant harm' (Aldgate and Tunstill in Tisdall 1997, 101). A confusing picture emerged in the U.K. where some authorities retrenched to only dealing with 'children in need' as those requiring child protection measures, therefore services to support the family at non-child protection levels were not developed across the board. Jeffrey (2003) reported that the Government was unhappy about the slow implementation in the Children Act and the fact that local authorities were not developing 'family support' services, and the Department of Health Report 'Messages from Research' report (1995) gave clear direction that there was a need to develop family support services to support children in need.

It is from this period of welfare reform that 'family support work' emerged both as a non-statutory and statutory service. It is a phrase in common usage within welfare services but it is extremely difficult to get a common definition or agreement as to what 'family support work' is or does. This section explored the literature in more detail to find out what writers believed family support work is or does. Chaskin (2006, 42) writes 'As a field of practice, family support for the most part has been characterised by the development and delivery of a diverse set of services provided by a broad range of practitioners and organisations (voluntary and statutory) in local communities'. Dolan et al (2006) elaborated this further by writing:

*‘...family support has become a major strategic orientation in services for children and families. It now occupies a significant place within the array of care and welfare interventions. It has global currency. Not only does it shape policy and practice in different countries but accords strongly with the unifying global agenda for children and families: The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Yet despite that continued development, family support remains elusive, it’s there, governments are promoting it, agencies are organised for it, workers are delivering it and families receiving it – but what is it’.*

Dolan et al (2006, 11)

Family support is being delivered widely in Britain, Ireland, America, Europe and Australia and New Zealand. Dolan suggests that family support is shaping policy and practice and makes a significant contribution to welfare practice. Penn and Gough (2002, 17) argued that family support work is ‘... one of those phrases that is used so often it has almost lost its meaning: or rather it encompasses so many meanings that it is difficult to entangle them’. Dolan et al (2006, 11) point out ‘... it is here, professionals deliver it, families receive it’ yet we are no nearer to getting a concise definition. Indeed a review of academic literature concerning ‘family support’, ‘family support work’ and ‘family support worker’ suggested that there is no shared academic view of what family support is, what it does, or who delivers it. The following section gives a range of definitions found in the literature. It is by no means a comprehensive list but it does give the reader an indication of the range of different definitions.

Gilligan (2000, 13) believes that family support is about supporting a child within the family unit, but he goes further and states ‘... family support is about supporting children’s social, psychological and educational development. It is about supporting their belonging to family, school and neighbourhood’. Gilligan (2000) describes family support as being on three different levels;

- ***Developmental Family Support*** – building universal services locally to support all children and families
- ***Compensatory Family Support*** – seeking to support disadvantaged families through special provision

- ***Protective Family Support*** – which seeks to strengthen the coping and resilience of individual families

Gilligan (2000, 15)

This chapter employs these three different descriptions of family support work as a ‘lens’ for the reader to view the various literature and policy documents in relation to family support work.

## **Developmental Family Support**

Developmental family support includes the provision of universal services and support available to all children and families. This includes services such as breakfast clubs; out of school provision; leisure facilities; educational activities etc. It also includes national organisations such as parenting help lines and advice services that are open to all children and families (DfES, 2004; Williams, 2004). Penn and Gough (2002, 17) describe a ‘...loose definition of family support, that is any service which social services, education, leisure and community services, health and voluntary organisations working in the borough considered they provided which supported families in bringing up their children’. Likewise, Hearn (1997) describes a model of support for families as;

*‘Family support is about the creation and enhancement of locally based or accessible activities and networks, with and for families in need. The use of such services will lead to positive outcomes such as alleviation of stress, increased self-esteem, enhanced parental and family competence and behaviour and increases the parents’ capacity to nurture and protect their children’.*

Hearn (in Carpenter 1997, VI)

Gardner (in Wright 2006, 93) describe a more powerful role for family support work where they write that family support is ‘... an element of social capital and a means of social inclusion, a way of reinforcing economic measures to end child poverty’. Similarly, McGhee and Waterhouse (2002, 280) see family support as a way of

overcoming inequalities in society due to focusing more on ‘... structural disadvantage and welfare reform’.

I concluded that these writers were describing services, which any or most local authorities should provide. Whilst I agree that the provision of locally based services can support children and families to become less socially excluded, I am less sure that this provision alone will ‘end child poverty’. Within the literature there does not appear to be any element of challenge to structural issues in society such as poverty, gender, race or disability etc. However, all of the definitions above appear similar in that they are emphasising the importance of universal services open to all children and families.

### **Compensatory Family Support**

In the U.K. there is a history of utilising programmes to challenge disadvantage in society i.e.; Community Development Programmes (CDPs) of the 1960s; Educational Priority areas (EPAs) of the 1970s (Corkey and Craig 1978; Cowburn 1986) and the Community Education Tradition in Scotland (Martin, 1996). A key feature of all of these programmes was that they used informal educational approaches to engage deprived communities. I suggest that compensatory family support has followed this tradition and includes services such as Education Action Zones (EAZs,) in England and New Community School projects (Now Integrated Community Schools) in Scotland (Riddell and Tett, 2001). These programmes were set up in areas of social deprivation and were aimed at encouraging parents to become more involved in their children’s education and through this improving children and families employment prospects.

Within England, EAZs were set up in 1998 to be ‘the standard bearers in a new crusade uniting business, schools local education authorities and parents to modernise education in areas of social deprivation’ (Power, 2001, 14). Similarly, in Scotland, New Community School projects, set up in 1998, were targeted at areas of deprivation with the ‘focus on the individual child, his or her family and the

community; the aim is to meet each child's needs in the round ...' Scottish Executive (1999, 2). New Community Schools were to be a 'focal point 'for children and families where they could access information and services and where families were to work in partnership with service providers. These programmes heralded a change in the culture of welfare provision where joined-up thinking and working emerged and where it reflected a 'broader understanding of the nature of social and educational exclusion' (Power, (2001, 19). A key feature of the NCS and EAZ programmes was that they were community based and looked for community solutions to the community issues and the local authorities had to 'bid' for funding based on disadvantage within the authority area (Riddell and Tett, 2001).

In the area of Compensatory Family Support Work, Chaskin (in Dolan et al, 2006, 50) argued that the community needs to be the locus for family support due to,

- Needs and issues for families being located within a given community and local knowledge of these communities to build responsive supports
- Staff relationships with the local community to facilitate support and engage local people in those supports
- Staff using the community connections to link families into wider networks of support.

Family support services in the area of compensatory family support work include sponsored day care, summer play schemes, respite care, day centre's (MacDonald and Williamson, 2002; Statham and Holtermann, 2004) to support families experiencing difficulties. These types of services are all offered at a local level in many authorities across the U.K. In addition there are national projects that cover larger areas and although they are providing 'local solutions to local problems' they are also working to a national agenda. These include Sure Start projects (Glass, 1999) and Home – School- Community Liaison project in Ireland (Ryan, 2000).

The Sure Start project operating throughout the U.K. Sure Start is said to be;

*‘... a radical cross-departmental strategy to raise the physical, social, emotional and intellectual status of young children through improved services. It is targeted at children under four and their families in need’.*

Glass (1999, 257)

Sure Start is an early intervention approach, which offers parents and children the opportunity to learn together in a safe nurturing environment. Projects offer advice, support, parenting classes, individual and group support, and crèche facilities. Whilst Sure Start is an example of developmental family support work aimed at early years, similarly, there are projects aimed at children and young people in schools. Ryan (2002, 171) cites the Home – School – Community – Liaison (HSCL) project in Ireland, an initiative designed to counteract educational disadvantage by increasing co-operation between schools, parents and other community agencies. The project promotes positive interventions between parents and schools and includes programmes such as self development courses, relaxation and assertiveness courses, leisure courses including aerobics, crafts, sewing, art, parenting courses, curricular development, self development courses and assertiveness courses (Ryan, 2002, 180). It was reported by Ryan (2002, 182) that through these non-threatening activities, many of which the parents have identified themselves, that the parents felt supported in their involvement with schools. They also report increased confidence and self esteem and ‘thus become more effective in their engagements with their children’.

It could be suggested that families receiving support within the community setting may feel less stigmatised as the ‘problem’ may not be located with them or their family. It may also be argued that some of the issues, i.e. poor housing, poor educational aspirations, lack of access to further/higher education etc. could be located within an impoverished community and lack of support from national government, the national/global economy etc. However, this compensatory approach has been criticised by a number of writers. Cowburn (1986, 10), on critiquing EPAs stated;

*'First that the lack of employment, inadequate housing, general dereliction etc came to be held responsible for the general education failure of children in these areas. Second the educational failure of the area generally, the lack of education among adults came to be held as having caused their problems'.*

Cowburn (1986, 10)

In a similar vein, Power (2001, 26) writes that the compartmentalised nature of EAZs has led to a narrow perception of social exclusion and 'seeking educational answers to social problems has long shown to be an inadequate approach that can serve to further pathologise the disadvantaged'. Fraser (1997) is much more direct in her criticism,

*'Although the approach aims to redress economic injustice, it leaves intact the deep structures that generate class disadvantage, thus, it must make surface reallocations again and again. The result is to mark the most disadvantaged class as inherently deficient and insatiable, as always needing more and more'*

Fraser (1997, 26)

I concluded from the literature that whilst compensatory family support can assist families living in areas of deprivation by offering a range of services to support children and families, it can also have the negative effect of rendering the community helpless through the fragmentation of services across the board and through areas of deprivation having to compete with each other for limited resources.

## **Protective Family Support**

The legislative context discussed above (Children Act (1989) in England and Wales and the Children Scotland Act (1995) in Scotland) was further strengthened by the publication of two new reports, For Scotland's Children Report (Scottish Executive, 2001b) and Every Child Matters (DfES, 2003) in England. These two reports indicated that the new Labour Government was committed to 'integrated' children and family services from local authorities and health service providers. The reports stated that the Government wanted to see more pro-active interventions to prevent

crisis situations in the lives of children and families, which could lead to higher and more costly interventions at a later stage. This was a major shift away from the child protection model operating within the U.K. Within an integrated approach the Government wanted to see protective welfare delivery, assessment of need and integrated working between service providers (Scottish Executive 2001b; DfES 2004). It is from this period of policy and legislative change that we can begin to see the development of 'protective' family support.

Gilligan (2000) describes protective family support work as;

*'Family support seeks to promote the child's safety and development and prevent the child leaving the family by reducing stressors in the child's and family's life, promoting competence in the child, connecting the child and family members to relevant supports and resources and promoting morale and competence in parents'.*

Gilligan (2000, 14)

Similarly, Wheal and Emson (2002) describe family support as;

*'Family support helps to promote the welfare of children and their families. It enables families to take control of their lives; helps families to help their children develop and grow; gives both the family and the child the opportunity to take their rightful place as active citizens in society'.*

Wheal and Emson (2002, xiv)

Protective family support involves one-to-one work or working with the family on an individual basis. The 'protective' element of this form of family support work takes many forms i.e. working with families under stress (McAuley et al, 2004), to protect families from eviction (Nixon, 2006), prevention of school exclusions (Barnado, 2006).

Artaraz and Thurston (2005, 2) described a protective early intervention programme aimed at preventing social exclusion of 5 to 13s year olds. They stated that the project has been successful due to a clear understanding by family support work staff



of the assessment process and a high level of service user's involvement in the process. At a much higher level of protective family support work, Nixon (2006) in her evaluation of an Anti-Social Behaviour Intensive Family Support Project described a programme where the family support workers work as part of a multi-disciplinary team and design individual support packages. This intensive support is said to have prevented children of the participants from being received into care and removed the risk of loss of tenancy for 80% of participants.

I concluded from the literature that the emphasis of protective family support work should be about promoting a positive view of the family and exploring all aspects of need, both implicit and explicit, which impairs a family's ability to cope in times of stress. This involves working in partnership with the family and undertaking a robust assessment to ensure that the families' needs and wishes are reflected within their assessment and support. Protective family support also involves working with a range of agencies to ensure that the supports they receive are coherent and fit within the families' circumstances.

However, whilst protective family support and service integration emphasises that parents should be active in the assessment, care and support of their children, some parents fear the loss of autonomy and self-determination once outside agencies become involved. Some parents report that services provide '... too little help, of too little practical relevance, too late and with such a heavy hand that parents felt undermined, belittled and even threatened' (Ghate and Hazel, 2002, 177). This is not a new criticism in the area of welfare delivery. For many years parents and children involved in welfare services have reported that services do not meet their needs and that services are organised around the providers' needs rather than the needs of the recipients (Davis, 2006; Scottish Executive, 2002). Another criticism of this form of family support work is that the child or family is viewed as being 'deficit' (Power, 2001). The families need support to engage with school; to parent their child; to become employed etc and by individualising the problem, structural issues are ignored. This section has discussed that whilst protective family support work attempts to support families in a holistic way it can also render the family as being

deficit and the cause of the problem. Rather than seeing the family as being ‘victims’ of structural issues in society such as gender differences; disability; race and sexuality.

One of the things that struck me in the literature regarding family support work was the lack of overt discussion on theoretical perspectives around the development of family support work. Only Dolan, Canavan and Pinkerton (2006, 15) explicitly discuss theoretical perspectives where they are attempting to locate family support work within ‘social support’ theory. With other writers such as Brown (2003); Jeffrey (2003) and Saltiel et al (2003) it is implicit within their writing that they have taken a theoretical stance, but it unclear exactly what their stance is. One might argue that they are taking a person centred approach, equally one might suggest that they are taking a systems theory approach, however it is not clear within the literature (Herbert et al, 2002; Lewis, 1999). I believe this lack of engagement with theoretical perspectives had a direct impact on the service being regarded as being ‘professional’. In my exploration of the literature it appeared implicit in the text that family support work was sitting between both ‘medical’ and social theories of support. I argue that this was a key area to be explored in this thesis and was important in establishing the role of family support.

A ‘medical’ model suggests that the ‘problem’ requires to be labelled or pathologised and dealt with on an individualised basis and the child or family are viewed as being ‘deficit’ in some way. The ‘medical’ model has been criticised for not allowing space for children and families to ‘... challenge traditional orthodoxy and fails to recognise conflicts of interest between children, parents and professionals (Davis, 2004, 143). The medical model of support is also criticised because it concentrates on a top down approach;

*‘Individuals, their families ...are interviewed, assessed, treated and intervened in/with using a variety of strategies. Rarely do workers talk about empowering, advocating and collaborating or even changing structures.’*

Hawkins (in Beckett, 2003, 629)

In contrast, a 'social' model of support appears to give more flexibility where the child or family is viewed within the context of the family and the community in which they live. A 'social' model of support concentrates on barriers children and families face, the rights of the individual and family and challenging the circumstances in which children and families find themselves (Swain et al, 2004; Herbert et al, 2002). An example of this work within children's services is the use of family group conferencing where '... the strengths and potential of families and a strong desire to work towards greater participation and empowerment of families' (Brown, 2003, 338). The whole focus of the social model of support is on empowerment of families to make their own decisions and to support them to challenge injustice. However, Hill and Tisdall (1997, 71) are critical of many of the so-called family theories as they have not traditionally involved children as active partners. Whilst this criticism may not relate directly to family group conferencing it relates to many of the practices within the social support model where the focus is on 'partnership or parent theories' rather than including the views of children and young people.

### **Conclusion to Section Three (chapter two)**

It is within this very complex maze of legislation, policy and differing values and that family support work takes place. In order to assist the reader to understand the various definitions of family support work I used a framework suggested by Gilligan (2000) to act as a 'lens' to view provision. He described three levels of family support work:

- Developmental – addressing universal services for all children and families
- Compensatory – supporting disadvantaged communities
- Protective – supporting individual children and families

This section concluded that within each of these levels there are competing demands and understanding of the role of family support work. However, within this framework there was a lack of discussion regarding the theoretical framework underpinning family support work. Only Dolan, Canavan and Pinkerton (2006) discussed theory within their discourse and linked family support work to 'social support theory'. Hence the central aim of this study was to investigate whether different respondents were aware of different academic perspectives and whether such constructs were useful in understanding the philosophies that underpin family support work. The following section explored the term 'family support worker' in more detail and discusses if the development of this role was to provide services which met the needs of children and families or if it was viewed as part of the Governments reform agenda.

#### **Section Four: Exploration of Staff Delivering Family Support Worker**

Another important 'shift' in the welfare reform agenda has been the challenge to professions involved in welfare delivery by both the Conservative and New Labour Governments. It is within this complex area that we can begin to see the emergence of the term 'family support worker' but like many of the other terms in this chapter there is no shared conceptual view or definition of what this role might be. The literature indicated that family support work is carried out in a number of contexts by a range of voluntary and paid staff and this study sought to find out if family support workers were part of a re-orientation of welfare provision to meet the needs of children and families or part of continuing public sector reform and reducing the power of the professionals.

Within the marketisation agenda (discussed in section one) a number of writers believed that there was also the role of challenging the power of the professions and trades unions (Hill, 1997; MacDonald 1995; Pierson 2004). In exploring the role of professions within our society one can see that their role in the development of the welfare state cannot be overlooked and this gave the professions power in society.

MacDonald (1995) argued that the professions not only helped develop the welfare state but also were

*‘... an important stabilizing factor in our whole society and through their international associations they provide an important channel of communication with intellectual leaders of other countries, thereby, helping to maintain world order’.*

MacDonald (1995, 2)

Perkins (in Powell and Hewitt 2002, 121) claims that from 1945 to mid 70s were ‘the golden years of professionalism’ the expertise of professionals was largely accepted by the state and this appeared to give the professions high prestige and with this financial rewards. However, Pierson (2004) described that during the 1960s and 70s there was a period of growing discontent within the public sector and that the Thatcher Government sought to reduce the power of both the professions and the trades unions through a modernisation and a marketisation agenda. This was achieved through legislative and policy changes and public sector reform across all sectors involved in the delivery of welfare services (Abercrombie et al, 1988; Ozga 2000; Pierson, 2004).

I suggest that from the late 70s onwards the power of the professions was challenged through the modernisation and marketisation of the welfare state where patients, pupils and social work users became ‘consumers’ in ‘markets’ designed by the state (Shain and Gleeson, 1999; Shore and Wright, 2000). Some writers claim that this marketisation of services eroded the power that the professions once had (Haug in Freidson, 1994; Fergusson 2000). The imperative to reform provision affected all aspects of public life including: teaching; social work; nursing; community education and further and higher education etc. None of these professions has been able to resist what Ball (2003, 215) refers to as ‘... this epidemic of reform’. Instead of professionals having control of their own knowledge, their knowledge base is driven by a new culture of ‘performativity’ (Ball, 2003; Cowan, 1996) in which all aspects of their work is controlled through measures such as; inputs, outputs; targets; appraisal; quality indicators, etc decided by others.

The integrated services agenda of New Labour has also had an impact on welfare delivery. Inherent within this agenda has been the reform of welfare providers and the expectation that local authority staff, health workers, police, voluntary sector etc will work together to provide 'seamless services for children and families. The For Scotland's Children Action Team (2001) states;

*'We need a much more robust approach to putting children and families at the centre of the service network. That will be facilitated by treating all services for children as part of a Children's Services System and by all staff perceiving them as operating within that single system'.*

Scottish Executive (2001b, 9)

Within this legislative and policy context there is ambiguity over the term 'integrated services' and what this implies for those working within children's services. Leathard (2003, 5) describes integration as being located within a 'terminological quagmire' where it has acquired a range of meanings and understandings. Scott (2006, 9) argues that '...there is little clarity around what is meant by integration; what it involves; what defines it as an activity and about the professional exigencies and relationships implied by it'. Anning et al (2006, 7) describe integration as different services becoming one organisation in order to enhance service delivery.

In addition to having no agreed definition of integrated working, there was also concern about the 'process' of bringing together a range of professionals within an integrated services (Rushmer and Pallis 2002; Gardener, 2006). Rushmer and Pallis (2002, 64) write 'Simply bringing together and calling a collection of differing professionals a 'team' does not guarantee shared tasks and knowledge, integrated inter-professional working or the seamless delivery of service'. Similarly, Frost et al (2005, 188) expressed concern that there is little consideration given to the conceptual frameworks for 'setting up, managing and delivering joined up services'. Despite the confusion over the lack of definition of the term integrated working, I concluded that the government expected that structural change was an outcome from integrated working not just 'joined-up' working where the structures remained the

same (Perri 6 et al, 2002, 36). Within this they were looking for professional staff from across the welfare spectrum to be co-located and to breakdown traditional barriers to service delivery.

It was within this complex mix of societal, political and policy change that we began to see the emergence of the term 'family support worker', but it was unclear from the literature 'who' delivered family support work and what qualifications were required to undertake this role. In some cases it appeared that the family support worker role was a re-orientation of welfare provision and was carried out by social work staff (Jeffrey, 2003). In other cases it appeared that family support work was on a continuum from a fairly low skilled occupation, to a service which required a high level of skills and qualifications (Capability Scotland, 2003; Dolan et al 2006; Learn Direct 2006; Ryan 2006). Within these systems, a range of staff carried out the family support work role. I suggest that this continuum of provision from the voluntary worker through to social workers only adds to the confusion of the role of family support worker and the training and expertise required for this role.

The voluntary (or not for profit) sector has a whole range of staff and volunteers under the heading of family support worker. The title of staff involved in these roles varied greatly for example 'Play at Home Workers (Saltiel et al 2003); Home-Start volunteer (Brown 2003), and family workers or family support workers (Capability Scotland 2003; Learn Direct 2006). Despite the title, these workers volunteered their own time to support vulnerable children and families and provide valuable support. The ethos behind many of these organisations was to provide regular long term support in the family's own home or community. Each organisation offered support and training to volunteers and these included areas such as; child protection; values and attitudes; role of the volunteer; working with families; confidentiality; listening skills etc (Brown, 2003; Saltiel, 2003). I concluded from this information that the role of the volunteer was to act as an 'assistant' to other staff such as a social workers or managers who plan the input of the volunteer. However, the role of the volunteers should not be under-estimated in the care of families. Brown (2003, 115) commented that 'volunteers can be a creative and beneficial addition to an organisation giving

support to families and are often more acceptable to families than a professional from a statutory organisation’.

Those who were employed in the area of family support also varied greatly, from staff requiring lower level, non-degree qualifications to those requiring degree level qualifications. For example; Learn Direct (2006) indicated that family support workers ‘assist families who are experiencing problems... the family support work is planned with social worker and own manager’. They state the minimum qualifications for this work is experience and NVQ/SVQ levels 2, 3, and 4 in childcare, health or social care. Perth and Kinross Council in Scotland (2008) recently advertised for a ‘child and family’ support worker to ‘assist in providing support, resources and care to young children ‘in need’. The worker was responsible to the senior child care worker and would undertake work, which had been identified through an individual care plan. The qualifications for this role were an HNC in Childcare and Early Years or an SVQ level 3 in Childcare. In these examples, the role of the family support worker appeared to be to act as an ‘assistant’ to a manager or worker having case responsibility.

In Ireland, the family support worker role had the title of ‘Home-School-Community Liaison’ worker. This role created links with children, families and the local community. Ryan (2006, 175) writes the terminology of ‘family support’ has not been widely used in the context of education in Ireland ... but much of the work carried out has related to the development of the family’. A teacher carries out this role and works with the community to design programmes of support. It is assumed from this information that the worker, a teacher, will possess higher level qualifications. I concluded from the description of this worker’s role that the Home-School-Community-Liaison worker works within a school and has the autonomy to be a lead worker for the family and make decisions with them and act on their behalf.

Jeffrey (2003, 36) discusses that social workers can deliver family support due to their particular skills and values, ‘... an empathic understanding of another’s situation; honesty and integrity; an appreciation of a family’s unique circumstances;



encouragement of self determination and knowledge of local resources'. However, she also commented that the pressure on social workers has left them less able to undertake non-child protection work. Again as discussed above, the social worker has the autonomy to make decisions on behalf of their clients and can direct the work of others. Jeffrey, (2003, 27) suggested that a hierarchy of support has developed within welfare delivery where '... new teams have been created, some concentrating on child protection, others on the delivery of family support'. Pinkerton (2006, 182) agreed with this and suggested that there are three distinct systems of practice in family support; child protection, out of home care (residential and foster care) and family support work.

I suggest that these views reflect the confusion around the emergence of family support work. Whilst the 'Messages from Research' report (DOH. 1995, 55) indicated that a continuum of support existed in the area of child welfare, they suggested that better outcomes for children could be reached 'without recourse to the child protection processes'. However, there is evidence that some agencies do not agree with this view. Platt (2001, 7) writes 'For many health and social work professionals and managers, there is a sense of unease that serious child protection issues might not receive an adequate response if low-key referrals are handled outside child protection procedures'. Pinkerton (2006, 182) expressed concern that family support work is not viewed as a different way of supporting families to keep them out of the child protection system but as 'a low status set of activities delivered in the local community, which does not challenge either policy or practice'.

## **Conclusion to Section Four (chapter two)**

Family support work has developed from a complex mix of governmental, philosophical, policy and practice change i.e. marketisation agenda, integrated services agenda, breaking down of professional barriers agenda, deprofessionalisation agenda etc. Within all of this complexity it was not clear 'who' delivered family support work. It was also unclear if family support work was a different way of working with children and families to avoid child protection

proceedings or a lower set of activities which do not challenge policy or practice. Within the continuum of volunteers or staff involved in the delivery of family support work I concluded that there are implications for practice. One could suggest:

- That family support work is viewed as a robust approach to modern welfare delivery. On the other hand,
- Family support work may also reflect the governments' lost confidence in the public sector where the service is based on outcome agreements and targets and where the workers carrying out this work do not offer any challenge to the status quo. Alongside this
- There was also the issue of an 'hierarchy' of service providers where some providers only view their service as being able to protect children and question if other services are equipped to undertake this task.

It is within this very complex area of children's service delivery that I explored the development of family support work within Pentesk Council. I wanted to find out if family support work within this authority was part of a discourse on philosophical, policy and practice change and building services to meet the needs of children and families within the local authority area. Alternatively, the emergence of family support work within the authority may have just been about 're-arranging the deckchairs' without any philosophical or theoretical underpinning to meet short term targets and time limited funding. I wanted to clarify this in my study for the benefit of service users, staff who deliver it and management who commission it as I believe that this is a key debate which affects not only this authority but has implications for children's service providers elsewhere.

## **CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER 2**

This chapter has reviewed literature on the welfare state from the 1980s onwards with a view to clarifying the roots of family support work and the significant 'shifts' in theory, policy and political agendas. I discussed the shift in the 'moral underclass'

discourses of the Conservative Government to the 'social integrationist' agenda of the New Labour Government. Within this shift lies a whole area of welfare reform where the role of the professions involved in welfare delivery has been called to question by the Government of both hues. The 1989 Children Act in England and the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 provided the political drive to move services from a reactive approach to more proactive, preventable services and local authorities being held to account for the delivery of these services. This policy shift led to the Government seeking 'participation' of parents, children and young people in policy making. The literature review showed that view of parents, children and young people as partners in policymaking and welfare delivery in a much-contested area.

The Integrated Children's Services agenda was another key 'shift' in welfare reform where all services for children should view themselves as being part of a single service. It is from this very complex area of welfare reform and political change that 'family support work' has emerged but it was unclear from the literature 'what' family support work is or 'who' delivers it. Family support work was viewed as:

- A 'service' or range of services to support both universal and targeted provision
- An 'approach' to supporting individual children and families
- A 'refocusing' of the role of social work in welfare service delivery

This study explored these areas further within the context of Pentesk Council, with a view to opening discussion regarding expectations of the role with a number of stakeholders. The literature review also highlighted areas to be examined during the course of this thesis. These were:

- What philosophical and theoretical approaches underpinned the development of family support work within this authority?
- Was there an understanding of the changing role of the family?

- Was there an agreed definition for the role of family support work?
- ‘What’ was being delivered under the heading of family support work?
- Was there an agreed definition of ‘who’ provides family support work?
- Is family support work a new or emergent profession within welfare delivery?

It was anticipated that in gaining some insight or answers to these areas within this research that it would contribute to defining the role and function of family support work within Pentesk Council. Through this, it may be that staff will feel more secure and the authority will improve their staff retention. Ultimately, in doing this, it is anticipated that the service we provide our children and families will be improved through staff feeling their role is valued and remaining in post. I also anticipate that the study will contribute to the body of knowledge regarding this relatively new provision ‘family support work’. The next chapter discusses my methodology, and how I intended to conduct this research with a view to illuminating the role of family support work within Pentesk Council.

# **Chapter Three**

## **Research Methods**

### **Introduction**

In the previous two chapters I outlined the difficulty in defining the role of family support work. From the literature it was unclear if family support work was:

- A ‘service’ or range of services to support both universal and targeted provision
- An ‘approach’ to supporting individual children and families
- A ‘refocusing’ of the role of social work in welfare service delivery

I also outlined a number of key fieldwork questions in relation to the role of family support work, these were:

- What philosophical and theoretical approaches underpinned the development of family support work within this authority?
- Was there an understanding of the changing role of the family?
- Was there an agreed definition for the role of family support work?
- What is being delivered under the heading of family support work?
- Was there an agreed definition of ‘who’ provides family support work?
- Is family support work a new or emerging profession?

This chapter discusses in-depth how I carried out this research with a view to illuminating the role of family support work within Pentesk Council and exploring which factors supported or hindered this process.

The fieldwork explored these questions within the context of the development of family support work in Pentesk Council. It attempted to clarify different stakeholders' expectations concerning the role of family support and family support workers within the authority. This chapter discusses the theoretical and practical 'methodology', employed within the fieldwork (Oliver, 2004). The chapter has nine sections:

- Section one discusses the research question and what influenced this
- Section two explored the chosen research method – Qualitative Research.
- Section three discusses my theoretical leaning 'critical theory' and what has influenced this choice.
- Section four explores the 'methods' used for collecting the data; firstly using the authority as a case study; then undertaking semi structured interviews with a range of respondents.
- Section five discusses Validity and Reliability through Reflexivity.
- Section six explores ethical considerations in this study.
- Section seven discusses how the data sample was chosen and the method of collecting the data

### **Section One: Research Question: What is Family Support Work?**

When a researcher wants to find something out they will usually have an idea of the 'problem' or issue to be researched. In this case I had identified a lack of clarity in the role of family support work within the local authority I am employed by. The next stage was to work out how I might gain information to explore this 'problem' and what my research question might be. Research questions are argued to be at the heart of social research, they 'define the types of understandings sought and the claims that might be made' (Knight, 2002, 5). The research question is argued to have five main aims:

- They organize the project and give it direction and coherence
- They delimit the project showing its boundaries
- They keep the researcher focused during the project
- They provide a framework for writing up the project
- They point to the data that will be needed

Punch (1998, 38)

I found this a helpful framework to use and in aiming to define my research question I undertook a process of ‘conceptual analysis’ (Knight, 1998, 3) where I started with a lot of questions raised by the issues discussed earlier in this thesis:

- Own experience as an operational manager
- Information from exit interviews
- Information from research project
- Emergence of FSW in both local and national context
- Information from literature review

I then ordered the information into groupings and categories then reduced this into smaller categories. I was then left with the question, ‘What is it I want to know from this research and how does this connect to the discussions outlined in previous chapters?’ It is argued that educational research has at least three purposes:

- to inform policy making - (Edwards, 2002, 160)
- to find out and develop new ideas (Swann and Pratt 2003)

- to change people's lives (Pring, 2000).

At the centre of my fieldwork was the aim to '... attempt to make sense of the activities, policies and institutions which ... help to transform the capacity of people to live a fuller and more distinctly human life' (Pring, 2000, 17). I perceived my research to very much be a mixture of all of the purposes above and this shaped how I developed my research question. I wanted to define the role of family support work within the local authority where I worked with a view to identifying barriers to retaining staff within the authority. Defining it within a small area was due to the fact that there was no clarity in the role of FSW either locally or nationally and at that time I could not undertake large-scale research. So for me, the key question in this research is:

### **'What is family support Work within the context of this local authority?**

I did think about making the question more complex but previous research undertaken as part of the EdD course showed that there was no consensus amongst the staff who deliver family support about their role (Smith, 2007). I then thought about the literature and the lack of clarity around the term 'family support', so I decided one crisp clear question would assist me explore the role of family support within the authority. What is family support work within the context of this local authority? Flowing from this question, I then identified sub questions that covered the issues identified in the literature review that required further investigation. The questions are highlighted in bold in the next section.

### **'What activities do the family support workers undertake?'**

Within the literature review it was unclear what family support workers did so this question was designed to find out what the family support workers in this authority did. Was it viewed as a service; an approach; a strategy? How did it differ from other services? Was there clarity of vision between middle management and senior management? How did their views differ or are they the same. What did family



support workers think their role was and how did this compare to staff from other agencies they were working beside?

### **‘How is family support work evaluated?’**

Within the literature review there was very little information on how roles were evaluated and this question was designed to find out a number of key things including: How families experienced family support work? How did partner agencies experience family support work? How and by what process what was it measured? What information was gained from the evaluation and how was this information used?

### **‘What contribution does FSW make to integrated children’s services in Pentesk?’**

This question was designed to find out if family support work was a different way of thinking about the delivery welfare services. Key sub questions included: Did family support overlap with other services? Where does it differ? How (if at all) is it the same? This question was extremely important because at that time, the local authority had recently received a poor child protection report, which indicated that the social work services and management was very poor. Yet integrated children’s services (of which family support work plays a large part) had received very good reports in three education inspections. Social work placed itself outwith integrated children’s services ( this issue will be discussed further in chapter five) so I wanted to find out what the impact of the report had been on the development of the role of family support work.

### **‘How do you see FSW developing over the next five years?’**

I wanted to find out if the authority and partner agencies viewed family support work as a long-term strategy? Had the authority thought of progression opportunities for

staff employed as family support workers? What was the authority doing to improve staff retention?

### **Involving Families in this Research**

I wanted to involve families in this research as I know from my role as an integration manager and from the literature that involvement of parents and children in the setting up of services is very limited. As discussed in chapter two, the rhetoric of government policy over the years has viewed parents as partners i.e., New Community Schools Report, (Scottish Executive, 1998). However, despite this rhetoric a number of writers indicate that viewing parents as partners is actually unsound due to the imbalance of power between the professionals, agencies and parents (Davis, 2002; Hatcher and LeBlond, 2001; Roaf, 2002). In this study I felt it was really important to include the views of families as Roaf (2002, 27) suggests that a contributing factor to successful integrated working is the inclusion of voice and experience of the participants. She states that ‘the detailed examples they give or the practical suggestions they make, provide useful accompaniment to the full scale government report’. I believed that including the views of parents would add to the richness of the data collected and make a valuable contribution to the discussion of what family support is or could be within this authority. In order to obtain their views I only intended asking the families two questions:

#### **‘What is your experience of family support work?’**

I wanted to find out what support the families received? Did it meet their needs? Were the family included in the planning and process of the support? How effective was that support?

#### **‘What support would families like to see?’**

Previous research I undertook as part of MSc. Research showed that parents were not bothered ‘who’ provided support but wanted support which was responsive and met

their families needs (Smith, 2002). Was this still the case? Or did families identify other forms of support which better met their needs?

With the research question and the sub questions being clear it was anticipated that this would then help me to plan the rest of the research. Following the setting of my research question and the sub questions I then looked 'how' I would undertake this research and this lead me to decide between qualitative and quantitative research methods, which are discussed more fully in the next section.

## **Section Two: Research Methods – Qualitative Research**

There is considerable debate about research methods and this is usually around the issue of quantitative versus qualitative methods, the positivist/empirical approaches against the hermeneutical/interpretive approaches (Hammersley, 2005; Nisbet, 2005; Pring, 2000; Swann and Pratt, 2003). Within this debate lies a commitment to epistemological, ontological and methodological stances. After much thought about the best way of gathering information for this study I decided that qualitative research methods suited the purpose of this research.

Qualitative research methods are a description of differing approaches in undertaking research. It covers a range of research methods including: ethnography; grounded theory and participant observation (Payne and Payne, 2004, 175). A key feature of qualitative research is that there is no fixed paradigm position and is described as '... multidimensional and pluralistic with respect to paradigms' (Punch, 1998, 140). In undertaking qualitative research, the researcher is involved in the process describing the social world in which we all exist, rather than undertaking research through the quantitative tradition of numerical data. The emphasis of this approach lies in collecting 'thick' data, i.e. in-depth information. Payne and Payne (2004) describe the key features of qualitative research as,

- Interpretation of the meanings rather than statistical associations between variables

- A holistic process, rather than a study in isolation
- An approach which sets out to encounter social phenomena as it naturally occurs
- An approach which uses a non-representative small sample of people, rather than using a large scale study
- An approach which focuses on the detail of human life

Payne and Payne (2004, 176)

In this research project my aim was to study the ‘problem’ in the context of one local authority and explore how family support work had developed and what the expectations of family support work were. In undertaking this research I chose a research method, which I argue was dialogic and allowed the participant a ‘voice’ in the research process. However, there are huge debates on the qualitative research traditions where some critics accuse the approach as lacking the ‘rigour’ of the quantitative paradigm (Higgs, in Byrne Armstrong, 2001, 45). Quantitative research is also said to carry ‘... an aura of scientific respectability because it uses numbers and can present findings in the form of graphs and tables, it conveys a sense of solid objective research’ (Denscombe, 2001, 177).

Despite these concerns I argue that qualitative research methods suited the purpose of this research because this method gave me rich data, which I then interpreted against the outcomes of the policy and theory and my own experience as an integration manager. As discussed above, there are many ways to undertake research and these are influenced by the research question and the researchers’ understanding of research paradigms and philosophical understanding (Byrne-Armstrong et al 2001). The following sections discuss my chosen theoretical position and what influenced this choice.

### Section Three: Theoretical Perspective: Critical Theory

My theoretical position in this research was ‘critical theory’, which is a purposeful approach that explores injustice within society (Byrne–Armstrong et al., 2001). Kincheloe and McLaren (2001, 291) argue ‘critical research can be best understood in the context of empowerment of individuals. Inquiry that aspires to the name critical must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or public sphere within society’. Collins (2003) argues that:

*Critical theory incorporates ‘economic, cultural and ideological analyses in its understanding of why the contradictions of late capitalism, including the everyday oppressions and widespread sense of alienation are still sustainable ... Such analyses are relevant for a clearer understanding of educational policy formation, curriculum development, the changing structure of educational institutions, teaching and learning processes and a host of other educational practices’.*

Collins (2003, 68)

The quotation by Collins struck a particular chord with me, as it appeared to capture the sentiment that in contemporary Britain there is still a place for methods to help us to understand the political and social processes taking place. Indeed, the critical theory paradigm closely relates to my own life experiences and underpins the knowledge base and self questioning approaches I have utilised in my practice as a community educator and as a manager of integrated children’s services provision.

I was introduced to critical theory and the work of Habermas and Friere during my training as a community education worker in the 1990s and engaged with the theories during my practice (Cohen et al, 2004; Weiner 2003). These theorists made an impression on me both as a student and as a practitioner, where they urged that our role as educators was to be critical of the education we offered, and the ‘need to approach learning not merely as the acquisition of knowledge but as the production of cultural practices that offer students a sense of identity, place and hope’ (Giroux, 1992, 169). In contemporary society, Ozga (2000, 47) argues that it is the role of the practitioner to develop independent assessments of policy so that we can contribute

to the social justice agenda. However, as Cohen et al (2004, 28) argue the purpose of critical theory is not merely to understand situations but to change them. They argue that critical theory ‘... seeks to emancipate the disempowered, to redress inequality and promote individual freedom...’ In undertaking a critical theoretical approach, I aimed to clarify the role of family support work and in doing this I anticipated that it could lead to better outcomes for children and families who received this service and for staff who delivered this service.

However a number of authors do not believe that critical theory offers such change. Thomas (2002) explains that qualitative enquiry should have modest aspirations, influencing one’s own practice and local practice. Harris, on the other hand (2003, 223) is particularly scathing by stating that ‘... thus critical theory can seem to be an unusual project in its relentless pursuit of the critical and negative ... for some critics this makes CT hopelessly eclectic, groundless and incoherent’. Alvesson and Skoldberg (2005) suggest that some critics find critical theory too left wing and radical. I can assure the reader that I am far from being left wing and radical but I do believe that my role is to support the children and families and staff I work with to create the circumstances in which their voice is heard. For example, we run parenting courses which explores not only parenting techniques, but discusses poverty, poor housing and lack of educational opportunities. However, Davis (2002) questions whose ‘voice’ is heard and what results are achieved through this type of work. Despite these criticisms I formed a view that using a critical theory perspective would allow me space to undertake this research and to hear the different voices of the participants in this research.

Grix (2002, 177) argues that our theoretical position is influenced by our ontological assumptions’. He argues that ‘... ontological assumptions are concerned with what we believe constitutes social reality’. I understand that this means that we each have our own view of the world and that is what influences our theoretical choices and subsequently our choice of methods. In reviewing the various theoretical perspectives, I decided that for me, the interpretative, paradigm suited the purpose of this research because I could collect data that involved in-depth discussion and

analysis. I employed ‘critical theory’ as I thought that this would allow me to explore policy, practice and issues surrounding the role of FSW. I saw this research as a process where my role as the researcher was to make the connections between the literature and data through critical interpretations of the interviews. In this process I make clear what is interpreted and how this relates to all the ‘microprocesses’ (i.e. text, policy and theory) within this research (Alvesson and Skoldbergh, 2005, 61). In order to undertake the research I then explored my methodology, ‘how’ I would undertake the research.

#### **Section Four: A Case Study Approach Using Semi Structured Interviews**

In the previous section I established that my theoretical position was that of critical theory and my epistemological position was qualitative research, this section discusses which ‘methods’ I used to gather information that complimented my theoretical position. Due to the complexity of children’s services provision in Scotland and the fact that there is no imperative for the thirty-two local authorities to deliver services in the same way (Scottish Executive 2001a, 9), it was my intention to conduct the research into FSW using the local authority area I am employed by as a case study.

In identifying which methods I used I had to consider a number of issues. These included;

- Time – I was a part time student undertaking an EdD but a full time employee of the local authority.
- Time implications of undertaking a study.
- Cost implications.

My choice of method was also heavily influenced by both my theoretical stance and by the nature of my research question ‘What is Family Support work? In discussion

with my supervisor we agreed that the ‘problem’ I had identified within my authority was interesting and reflected issues in contemporary society and therefore would merit research at EdD level. We also agreed that I needed to limit the scope of the study to the local authority due to the limitations of time and funding. This then led to me deciding that using the local authority as a ‘case study’ was the most appropriate way forward. I chose this method (case study), as I believed it gave me the opportunity to study a particular area of interest, (what is family support) within the confines of a small local authority. This enabled me to gain a whole authority picture (e.g. by including key respondents in a variety of management positions) that would not have been achievable in a larger study.

As discussed in chapter one and two, defining FSW is a complex area with no agreed definition either locally or nationally. In using this authority as a case study I was able to create a ‘boundary’ around the research. A key feature of a case study is that it is ‘bounded’ around a specific instance or area and provides a ‘... unique example of real people in real situations ... and can enable the reader to understand how ideas and abstract principles can fit together’ (Cohen et al, 2004, 181). As an approach, a case study ‘aims to understand the case in depth, and in its natural setting, recognising its complexity and its content’ (Punch 2000, 15). In using a case study approach I intended to draw out key themes and issues, which were not only relevant to this authority, but also had wider relevance elsewhere.

Criticisms of using a case study approach include concerns that it is generally used for interpretive work rather than the quantitative studies. Smith (in Cohen et al 2004, 183) writes, ‘The case study method ... is the logically weakest method of knowing. The study of individual careers, communities, nations and so on has become essentially passé’. There are also issues of validity and the reliability of such approaches (Knight 2002; Payne and Payne, 2004) however despite these criticisms I felt at that time that using the authority as a case study would help me gain the information I required. That it would enable me to illustrate how social policy initiatives regarding one aspect of integrated children’s services; the development of



family support work in Scotland, has impacted on a group of staff within one local authority.

Alongside using the authority as a case study I decided to use semi-structured interviews, as I believed this method gave me a 'vehicle' to interview a whole range of respondents from children and families, operational staff, directors and heads of service. This study was not about counting answers and drawing conclusions from numerical data. Instead, it was aimed '... to get people to explain their answers at length' and draw on these statements to identify common features or differing views across the interviews (Drever, 1997, 6). In undertaking 'semi-structured' interviews all respondents answered broadly the same questions, which allowed for comparison between each interview and this allowed me to facilitate data organisation and analysis (Cohen et al, 2000).

Whilst the respondents answered the same broad questions, the interview process also allowed for a responsive approach, where there was space in the interview to react to issues raised by the respondent. I was aware that in choosing this method that there could be difficulties. Bechhofer and Paterson (2000, 55) argue that researchers often choose this method because they think it is the '... easiest, almost natural thing to do', whereas the reality is that it actually quite a difficult, time consuming process. However, after exploring alternative ways of gathering data, I believed that such a qualitative research tool enabled me to achieve four main outcomes. These were:

- To move beyond simply counting participants' responses to understanding deeper meanings
- To promote freedom of 'voice' for participants
- To set respondents at ease in an informal, confidential, open and honest setting
- To compare how these voices and meanings differ between respondents from different backgrounds and social contexts.

In undertaking semi-structured interviews I, as the researcher, used the process of the interview to create a space where the respondent could speak freely and where I asked the ‘why’ questions i.e. ‘why do you think this happened’. I could probe answers more deeply, rather just accepting an answer blandly without question. This is one of the key elements in adopting a critical theory approach where the researcher asks how the ‘prevailing order’ came about and questions the origins of a process ...’ (Ozga, 2000, 45).

One of the main benefits of this type of interview was that it was an interactive process where the researcher is face-to-face with the respondent so they can engage with and create a relationship, which helps in the process of eliciting information. I could also see if the respondent was uncomfortable through their body language, facial expressions etc and this added to the richness of the data collection. As Walford (2001) advises, what the researcher observes is as important as what they say. There was also less likelihood of a question being misunderstood by either researcher or respondent because questions and answers were clarified during the course of the interview. In undertaking semi-structured interviews I was aiming to create a space where the respondent could engage in a dialogic process and in doing this I used the information gleaned from the interview as data for this research. Whilst this approach appears positive in chapter four I discuss the difficulties I encountered during the fieldwork process.

## **Section Five: Validity and Reliability through Reflexivity**

In this section I discuss the validity and reliability in undertaking this research project. Validity and reliability in social research is an area of contention between those who believe that in undertaking qualitative research we need to engage in the in the process of ‘proving’ our research through these methods (Knight, 2002; Payne and Payne, 2004). Silverman (2000) argues that;

*‘unless you can show your audience the procedure you used to ensure that your methods were reliable and your conclusions valid, there is little point in aiming to conclude a research dissertation.’*

Silverman (2000, 175).

As discussed above, I have indicated that my 'ontological position is critical theory and due to this I cannot claim neutrality in this study. This is argued to be one of the main criticisms between the positivist and interpretative research traditions. Positivist research is argued to be based on 'hard', neutral, scientific and numerical data (Swann and Pratt, 2003). Whereas interpretive research is argued to be based on collecting 'soft' data, studying 'people, things and events in their natural setting (Punch, 2000, 149). Thomas (2002) suggests that reliability and validity is very much the domain of positivist research. Thomas (2002, 427) states that the appeal of qualitative research lies in its '... dismissal of pretend science notions such as reliability, validity, generalisation, prediction'. However, it is within this very confusing area that I as a researcher need to show the reader that my research is trustworthy and based on more than 'anecdotalism' (Silverman, 2004, 177). Despite the complexity of the arguments I would like the reader of this research project to understand that the outcomes from this research are based on a solid foundation of my theoretical position, research methods and an accurate account of the findings. This will be undertaken through a process of 'reflexivity'.

Permeating this whole research project was my engagement with reflexive practice, where I constantly reflected on my processes and decisions. Reflexivity in qualitative research influences everything within our research from our choice of methods, our choice of questions – those we leave in, those we leave out, our choice of participants etc. But it goes much further than this, it does not '... simply report "facts or truths" but actively constructs interpretations of his or her experience in the field and then questions how these interpretations came about' (Hertz, 1997, vii). I understand this to be that the researcher considers and debates other truths or interpretations in relation to the data and questions their own assumptions and interpretations regarding the issues under discussion.

As a reflexive practitioner, I have clearly outlined my research proposal indicating both how and why I am undertaking this research. I have also located the 'self' within the research proposal; so that the reader can draw his or her own conclusions

from this research. Richardson (2000) provides a helpful checklist on reflexivity; she suggests the following areas are important for the researcher to engage with;

- Is the author cognizant of the epistemology of post modernism?
- How did the author come to write this text?
- How was the information gathered?
- Are there ethical issues?
- How has the author's subjectivity been both as a producer and product of the text?
- Is there adequate self-awareness and exposure for the reader to make judgements about the point of view?
- Does the author hold him or herself accountable to the standards of knowledge and telling of the people he or she studied?

Richardson (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, 937)

I suggest that in undertaking this research proposal and project that I have engaged with these concepts and that the reader of this research will be able to see how and why I have collected the information and how this has been interpreted through my epistemological and ontological understandings of the world.

However, despite my confidence that I had a robust approach to this study it was highlighted to me when I presented my research proposal to the review board that commitment to reflexive practice was not enough to ensure validity and reliability. Some of the academics on the review board wanted to see evidence of 'triangulation' in this study. In fact, I would go so far as to say that a lively debate took place between us all regarding reliability and validity. Despite the liveliness of the debate no-one on the review board could agree what the benefit of triangulation in this study would be. This concerned me as I felt that having to provide evidence of

triangulation would undermine the methodological position I had taken. On the other hand I was also concerned that not taking the advice of the academics on the board was arrogant on my part, they had taken the time to read my proposal and provide constructive criticism and they felt that triangulation was an important part of this research.

I researched the term ‘triangulation’ and as evidenced during the review board there is no agreed notion of what triangulation is. The whole concept of validity and reliability in qualitative research methods is a much-contested area, which I do not have the space to rehearse here. However, it is suffice to say that there remains vigorous ongoing discourse between the positivist and interpretive research traditions in how qualitative researchers prove the reliability in their chosen methods (Bryman, 2002; Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Guba and Lincoln, 1981). In exploring triangulation as a way to validate my research I was met with a whole array of definitions. Cohen et al (2004, 112) describe triangulation as ‘the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of human behaviour’. Denzin (1970) describes different methods of triangulation; time triangulation – data gathered over differing time periods; triangulation of sources – comparing different data sources; theoretical triangulation – drawing on different theories. Those in favour of triangulation argue that it can be one way to rescue qualitative research from its ‘rigourlessness’ to prove our research is based on more than a few well-chosen anecdotes (Silverman, 2004). Knight (2002) disagrees with this approach as he argues that;

*‘... data obtained with methods that rest on very different views of the social world cannot be blended together because positivism, on the one hand and hermeneutics, on the other produce accounts stemming from fundamentally different ontologies and epistemologies’.*

(Knight, 2002, 127)

What I was aiming to achieve was that at a given point in time, I reported the views of people taking part in this research and this is my interpretation of that event. I am not claiming that this is the ‘truth’ or a ‘truth’. It is my impression of a given event.

After much soul searching and discussion with my supervisor I eventually decided that I would not include evidence of triangulation in this research, as there was a danger that in adopting a triangulation hypothesis I was engaging in processes that did not suit this research. I am supported in my argument that triangulation cannot and is not able to validate 'truth' by Barbour (in Oakley, 2002) who writes '... none of the five 'technical fixes' most cited in methods literature as rescuing qualitative research from its rigourlessness – purposive sampling, grounded theory, multiple coding, triangulation, and respondent validation – are anything more than spurious 'bumper stickers' designed to boost academic credibility. My chosen research method is about giving 'voice' to the stakeholders. I hope that the reader will be able to judge its validity through the '...verisimilitude' it invokes in readers, a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable and possible' (Ellis and Bochner, in Denzin and Lincoln 2000, 751). It is anticipated that in using reflexive practice that the reader will see that this research has been undertaken through a robust methodological process and be able to draw their own conclusions about the trustworthiness of the account. Included in reflexivity is the researcher's commitment to ethical practice and the following section discussed this in more detail.

## **Section Six: Ethical Considerations**

I undertook this research because it both interested me and it was my aim that there will be some form of change for those involved in family support work. This involved me acting in a professional manner reporting my findings honestly and treating the respondents with respect. Payne and Payne (2004, 66) advise that 'ethical practice is not an add-on to social research but lies at its very heart'. Ethical considerations permeated through this whole research project and included interactions with the respondents, allowing for non-participation, allowing participants to withdraw at any time, dealing with disclosures, reporting the finding in an honest way, storage of data, etc. Underpinning this whole research project is the fact that no harm came to those taking part. This was especially important where I interviewed staff who were subordinate to me, where I was careful not to pressure

them into taking part. This also applied to interviewing families who used our service where they may be vulnerable due to drug use, mental health issues or criminal activity and it was important that they could not be identified through any aspect of this research. The Glasgow Centre for the Child and Society (2007) advise that;

*'studies should contribute to societal benefits through improving human knowledge and understanding. Researchers also need to recognise, however the potential for the researchers intrusiveness. The benefits must always outweigh the possible harm.'*

Glasgow Centre for the Child and Society (2007, 10).

In undertaking this research I realised that I was in an immensely privileged position, my authority supported my study with both funding and time to attend the course. They were also aware of the area I wished to study for my thesis, which is critical of some aspects of the management of integrated children's services. This then left me in a difficult position where I had to give an honest account of my findings. I was supported in this dilemma by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004, 4), who state that 'Researchers in a democratic society should expect certain freedoms, viz: the freedom to investigate and to ask questions, the freedom to give and receive information, the freedom to express ideas and to criticise the ideas of others, and the freedom to publish research findings'. This then supported me, but I also needed to support the respondents in the interviews, this was done through a process of 'informed consent'. Silverman (2004, 201) describes informed consent as;

- Giving information about research which is relevant to subjects decision about whether to participate
- Making sure that subjects understand information
- Ensuring that participation is voluntary
- Where subjects are not competent to agree, obtaining consent by proxy.

In undertaking this study, respondents were invited to meet with me and the letter of invite outlined my commitment to them as a researcher (see appendix 1). The letter stated how I intended to gather and report the information gathered. It also gave the participants the guarantee of handling the data in a confidential manner but it also included the disclaimer relating to child protection issues. A key issue in interviewing families was that they had to be made aware that whilst I was offering confidentiality if I suspected that there was child protection issues that I would have acted on these. Cohen et al (2004, 62) write that if the researcher has given a guarantee of confidentiality, then the researcher must respect this. They state that ‘on the whole, the more sensitive, intimate or discrediting the information, the greater is the obligation on the researchers part to make sure the guarantees of confidentiality are carried out in spirit and letter’.

However, for me, the area of child protection over-rode this guarantee of confidentiality. As an employee of a local authority, we have child protection guidelines that strictly forbid us to give guarantees of confidentiality to any child or adult where child protection issues are concerned (Pentek Council Child Protection Guidelines, 2002b). This information was laid out clearly in the invitation to participate in the research and it allowed the participants to decide if they wished to take part in the study. I believed that in giving this undertaking that I met the process of informed consent as described by Silverman (ibid) above.

This research proposal had also been submitted to the University of Edinburgh Ethics Committee for consideration at level two which covers:

*‘... novel procedures or use of atypical participant groups – usually projects in which ethical issues might require more detailed consideration but were unlikely to prove problematic’.*

University of Edinburgh, (2007)

It is my understanding that through the use of the BERA guidelines and the university ethical guidelines that I met the ethical requirements for a researcher within this study. In this section I have discussed the ethical considerations I had to



take into account in the process of planning and undertaking this research. The following section moves on to discuss how I chose the participants in this study.

## **Section Seven: Study Sample**

Cohen et al (2004, 92), advise that choosing a sample is one of the most difficult parts of the research project and that the 'quality of a piece of research not only stands or falls by the appropriateness of the methodology and instrumentation but also by the suitability of the sampling strategy that has been adopted'. Punch (2000, 193) suggests that due to the variety of qualitative research methods there is no overall sampling strategy. It was a crucial part of this research, but it was influenced by factors such as cost; timing; availability of respondents; researchers' available time etc.

I decided that I would undertake this research during June, July and August 2007, when staff, including myself, was less pressured. Crucially, this was also a time when staff took annual leave, however, I decided to go ahead during this time. Silverman (1997, 106) states that 'in independent, unfunded research, you are likely to choose any setting which, while demonstrating the phenomenon in which you are interested, is accessible and will provide appropriate data reasonably readily'. In this research project, whilst I was constrained by timing and availability of respondents I chose a group of participants whom I argue made a contribution to clarifying the role of FSW within the authority. I chose to undertake the semi-structured interviews with the following different groupings,

- Members of the children's services planning group – strategic managers
- Members of the implementation group – operational a managers
- Operational staff involved in working with family support workers
- Family support workers
- Children and families who use our service.

Due to issues of confidentiality I have not identified the titles of the respondents chosen for this research. Respondents were chosen from the 'Children's Services Planning Group' (CSPG) who have strategic management of integrated children's services. It was my intention to gain interviews with four members of this group as I argue that these were the 'key' players in that they had the majority of the budget and staff involved in integrated working which contributed significantly to the development of family support work.

The second group of participants consisted of members of the 'Implementation Group' who have operational management of integrated children's services. It was anticipated that I would interview four members from this group. This again was a key grouping of people who had day-to-day management responsibility of staff and budgets. They also had a pivotal role in the development of integrated children's services and family support work.

The third group of participants included in this research project were those who worked at 'Operational Level' either with or as family support workers. This group included Family Support Worker (x 2), Teaching Staff (x 2), Social Worker (x 2), and Health Worker (x 2). This grouping of staff worked directly with the family support workers and had intimate knowledge of the work family support workers undertook. Staff from this grouping were selected by placing each agency's representative's name in a hat and asking a staff member to draw this out. In this way there was representation from across the authority in the study.

The final group of people I included in this research were four families who had received a service from family support workers. As discussed earlier, I felt it was really important to try to gain the views of service users, as they are the recipients of this work. Those I chose were; a family where early intervention approaches took place; a family who did not receive the services they felt they needed; a young person's view and a family where the situation worsened. I believed that including the views of this group would add to the richness of the data collected and made a

valuable contribution to the discussion of what is family support within this authority.

The total number of interviews planned was twenty and it was anticipated that in interviewing this range of people that I would gain a balance between the differing views of the role of FSW within this authority. I was also aware that there was varying levels of 'power' within these groupings from seeking responses from those who set the agenda and '... might be anxious to maintain their reputation' (Cohen et al, 2004, 122) and those who are less powerful, i.e. staff who are subordinate to me or parents who don't feel they have any power. I argue that the directors and managers of services had a strategic role in setting the agenda for integrated children's services and the operational staff involved in the services usually had opportunities to contribute to this through team meetings, individual and service planning. So although staff may have felt that they did not have any power in setting the agenda they will have input into the process.

Whilst I cannot argue that this sample was representative of all of those involved in developing the role of family support work, I suggest that this sample gave me enough data from which key themes emerged to inform this research. Bell (1987, 74) states that 'opportunity samples of this kind are generally acceptable as long as the makeup and size of the sample is clearly stated and the limitations of such data realised'. For small study like this it is impossible to interview everyone and I did consider how I could collect the views of a wider range of stakeholders. However, it came down to availability of my time to undertake the research, availability of staff and cost effectiveness of such a study. In discussion with my supervisor and advice received from my EdD review board it was agreed that I could also include in my study findings from previous research with family support workers as part of my EdD course and evaluative evidence from across the authority which is collected for Government Inspections and as part of the local authority quality assurance measures. This section has discussed how I chose the participants for this study and what influenced these choices. In chapter four I discuss the difficulties encountered in accessing participants for this study and conclude that no-matter how positive

one's proposal looks on paper, the researcher must always be aware of difficulties. The following section discusses how I intended to gather information during the course of the interviews.

The whole focus of my chosen research method was to create an atmosphere where the participant could talk at length. Letters were sent inviting the participant to attend an interview and appointments and locations were chosen to suit the participant (see appendix 1). The letter of invitation outlined how long each interview would take and the participants were given a copy of the questions so that they had time to prepare for the interview if they so wished. The letter also outlined my intention to record the interviews if the participant agreed to this. This was all designed to make the participant as comfortable as possible so that I could elicit information. Denzin and Lincoln (1994, 353) describe the interview as a '... conversation, the art of asking questions and listening', they further add that the interview is not a neutral tool and that the researcher creates the situation in which the answers are given. In this situation I was attempting to create the space in which I could achieve honest dialogue with the participant.

Where possible, all interviews were recorded with a digital tape recorder and I also took short notes during the course of the interview. It was anticipated that in using this combination of methods that I would capture the information from respondents in a non-threatening way. However, some of the respondents found the use of the digital recorder intimidating and I compromised by taking only notes. Cohen et al (2000, 281) argue '... it is a trade-off between the need to catch as much data as possible and yet to avoid having so threatening an environment that it impedes the potential of the interview situation'. The focus of the interview was aimed at getting the respondent to talk at length rather than getting 'answers' to the questions (i.e. How does the respondent think this happened, or why do they think this happened?) This is argued to be a key feature of qualitative research where the researcher and the respondent have an interactive relationship (Knight, 2002; Silverman, 2004). The focus on this research was to collect data which gave an insight into what a range of respondents thought family support was rather than a 'verbatim' transcription of the

interview (Agar, 1980). Once the interviews were completed I transcribed the recording and added my notes, from this, I then summarised the key points from each interview. This was then sent to the participants so that they could, if they wished, comment on the content. This method attempts to ensure that the researcher has not misrepresented the respondent's views and acts as a feedback mechanism to the respondent. I also anonymised all of the transcripts and paperwork to ensure that the respondents personal details or views could not be identified either in documents or by accessing my computer. These processes underpin the ethics of any study and are part of the reflexive process and add to the readers assurance that the researcher has produced a 'trustworthy' account (Cohen et al, 2004; Hertz, 1997).

## **CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER THREE**

In this chapter I set out how I undertook this research, the methods used and what influenced these choices. Undertaking research is complex interplay of the researcher's epistemological and ontological stances coupled with pragmatic influences that constrain a study. This chapter explored this complex interplay in detail:

- Section one discussed how I arrived at the research question and sub questions
- Section two discussed my chosen research method, qualitative research where I critically examined the benefits of such an approach
- Section three discussed my theoretical leaning 'critical theory' and what influenced this choice
- Section four discussed my 'methods' for collecting the data, firstly through using the authority as a 'case study, then employing semi structured interviews as a tool for gaining information from a range of respondents

- Section five explored validity and reliability through reflexive practice and the advice given at my review board where I was advised to include triangulation to ‘prove’ that my research was reliable
- Section six explored ethical consideration and the tension in offering respondents anonymity
- Section seven discussed how the participants were chosen for this research and the method of collecting the data
- Section eight discussed how I intended to process the information I collected and turn this into data for this study.

When writing about this process now it appears that this research was put together in a very linear way, starting at ‘a’ moving onto to ‘b’. However, having utilised these methods, chapter four will discuss the limitations of the approaches chosen and difficulties encountered during the course of the fieldwork.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Reflection on Fieldwork**

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter I outlined the methods I would utilise in this study and this chapter discusses my experience of the fieldwork section of this research and the ‘messiness’ of undertaking research. Fontana and Frey (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) write that in many studies, the information presented tends to be not reflective enough, where the data flows smoothly and the information is presented as non-contradictory. When one sits and puts together a proposal it often appears as a linear process, whereas in reality the researcher is moving backwards and forwards in the research continuum (Fontana and Frey; 2000, Knight, 2002). Reflecting on the methods used I found that I agreed with Silverman (2004, 121) who comments that ‘no matter how elegant your original research proposal, its application to your first batch of data is always salutary’ and I discuss the difficulties I have encountered whilst undertaking this research.

I will show the reader that in undertaking this research that it was a long laborious process with many pitfalls along the way, some which were unavoidable and some, which were down to my planning. This is argued to be part of the reflexive process where the researcher demonstrates the procedures taken during the research and presents their arguments so that the reader can make a judgement on the quality of the research (Denscombe, 2001; Knight, 2002; Payne and Payne, 2004). This method of sharing information has been criticised as ‘narcissistic’, (Geertz in Knight, 2002, 194) and as an ‘exercise in self justification’, (Seal in Knight, 2002, 194), however I believe it is helpful for the reader to be aware of the difficulties I encountered and not to be presented with a pristine, sanitised version of my account. This chapter has seven sections:

- **Section One: The Changing Nature of the Study**  
This section discussed the crisis within the Authority and the changing political and policy landscape during the course of the study that have led to tensions regarding the understanding of the role of family support work.
- **Section Two: Problems Encountered During the Fieldwork**  
This section explored problems encountered during the course of the study. It concluded that research is fraught with difficulties and I have had to work hard to ensure ethical standards are maintained.
- **Section Three: The Interview Process**  
This section highlighted difficulties in the interview process. It illuminates that the respondents and the researcher may have very different reasons for engaging in the research encounter.
- **Section Four: Interview Feedback**  
In this section I discussed the difficulties I had in gaining formal feedback from the participants and how I overcame this to ensure that my study met ethical standards.
- **Section Five: Data Organisation**  
This section discussed how I began the process of turning all the information I now had into 'data' for this study through 'First Order and Second Order Principles' (Knight, 2002; Munn 2006).
- **Section Six: Limitations of the Study**  
This section discussed if my methods helped me gain the information I was looking for in this study and concluded that despite the difficulties encountered that the data provided some fascinating insights into the development of family support work within Pentesk Council.
- **Section Seven: Conclusion**  
This section concludes that fieldwork is complex and fraught with difficulties yet it is this complexity that makes the study exciting. This



research has taken place within a moving framework of structural, political and policy change and this has influenced how the respondents have engaged with the research.

## **Section One: Changing Nature of the Study: Crisis within the Authority and Changing Political and Policy Landscape.**

### **Crisis within the Authority**

What has been really interesting about taking part in this research is that the whole project has been punctuated by ‘change’ and I argue that these changes had a direct impact on the area I was researching. Throughout this study I referred to a recent poor child protection report and impact of this on staff changes within the authority and suggest that this has impacted on the understanding of the role of family support work. I also discuss that for the last four years social work has indicated that they will only work with children with ‘child protection issues’; ‘looked after’ children and children with ‘disabilities’. I suggest that there are reasons why social work within this authority has adopted this stance. The Messages from Research report (DOH, 1995) indicated that far too many children were being dealt with under the heading of ‘child protection’ when in reality they should be dealt with under the heading of ‘child in need’ (this area is discussed further in chapter five). I argue that this coupled with the poor child protection report has led to a ‘crisis’ within the authority due to a rapid turnover of management and staff that knew the welfare system in operation.

When the Child Protection report was published a number of key personnel in social work resigned immediately, namely the Convenor of Social Work and the Social Work Director and this was followed by the resignation or retirement of staff at all levels including the Head of Children and Families, Manager of Children and Families and Team leaders within Children and Families section. The impact of this on children’s services should not be underestimated and I would go so far as to call this a ‘crisis’ period within the authority. The authority lost both frontline staff and

management with local knowledge and understanding of families, communities, partner agencies and systems operating within the authority. Staff that left, were replaced in the first instance with locum staff, then staff who were recruited from overseas. This led to language and cultural misunderstandings between families and professional staff and the turnover of staff within social work was very high (Pentek Council 2008a).

The impact of this was felt throughout the authority and for those on the ground this period felt very unsafe and there were concerns that the needs of children within the authority were not being met. Agencies such as health visiting and schools were not as prepared to monitor or hold onto cases they were concerned about as they might have done in the past and it appeared that absolutely everything was reported to social work as 'child protection'. Due to this, social work experienced a higher number of referrals than ever before. In turn, the social work department deflected many of these referrals to family support workers whether they were relevant or not, as they could not cope with the volume. This led to some heated exchanges between integration managers and managers of social work and education services about the role of family support work.

It was important to include this information within this study to alert the reader to the context in which family support work was taking place and to the impact this crisis was having on families, staff and the wider community. I realise now looking back that this was a symbol of underlying themes within this study:

- The problems created by the lack of clarity of the family support work role
- The difficulties with the structures in place which supported or hindered the development of the family support work role
- Tensions in workplace politics i.e. defensive practice versus vested interests

These areas will be explored further in chapters five and six but very much relate to the work of Peri 6 et al, (2002) and Weick (1995) where they discuss the conditions for change within organisations.

## **Recovering from Crisis**

During this period an external consultant was commissioned by social work to write a 'recovery plan'. The consultant recommended that the family support workers should come under social work management so that social work could direct their work and role. There appeared to be little consultation on this report with staff external to the social work department and I understand that the report was circulated without having been discussed at the Children's Services Planning Group. There was much discussion at directorate level and it was finally agreed that the recommendations in this report would not go ahead. Peri 6 et al (2002, 102) writes that in times of crisis '... necessity is still the mother of invention ... 'and that there are opportunities to create new innovative responses to the crisis'. However, I suggest that the recovery plan exacerbated the feelings of distrust between integration managers, social work managers, social workers and family support workers. This situation has continued throughout my research and it is only now, some eighteen months later that we can begin to see some signs of recovery within the authority. The impact of this is that the authority has the second highest number of children per head of population on the Child Protection register in Scotland (Pentek Council, 2008a) and that there is a lot of trust needing to be built between social work and other children's service providers.

As outlined in chapter one, the management of the integration teams within the authority was through a complex bureaucratic structure where two of the integration teams were line managed by social work and two were managed by education. This in itself had led to tensions in the past where different value bases, vested interests and competing demands had impacted on the development of the role of the family support workers and the vision for integrated children's services. As a result of the recovery plan produced by the independent consultant it was decided in September

07, that the full management of the four integration teams would now come under the Director of Education. This was an interesting development, which I suggest suited some staff and not others. There was no discussion or consultation with integration managers or staff regarding this change, we just received an e-mail confirming the change of management. Whilst I admit that this suited my team and me, other people in the teams were less happy about this development. I realised at this point that I was becoming aware of my own bias and that good integrated working was about looking at the 'whole' beyond my own vested interests and exploring others concerns.

There was a view by some of the respondents that in being managed solely by education that schools would direct the integration teams work and that the 'welfare' element of support to children and families would suffer. This view was not shared by all staff within the integration teams and some respondents indicated that at last they now had an 'identity'. Weick (1995, 23) suggests that individuals need to have a sense of identity in order to confirm their sense of 'self'. Staff also expressed delight that they could now access training previously denied to them because they did not have this sense of identity, as they were not regarded as education or social work staff. The complexity of budgets within integrated children's services had meant that previously some sections refused to fund training as the staff were not funded out of 'mainstream' social work, education or health budgets, but through the various additional funding streams within the authority i.e. Children's Change Fund; Integrated Community Schools Funding; Additional Support for Learning Funding etc. Now that integration team staff management came under one section it was felt by some staff that this would open doors to training activities.

### **Changing Political and Policy Landscape**

There have also been changes in policy and practice which affected all children's services providers in Scotland through the 'Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC, Scottish Executive, 2005a) policy document. The GIRFEC guidance highlighted changes in referral to the Children's Hearing System and that children

would require an 'Integrated Assessment and Action Plan' before a referral to the Children's Reporter should be considered. The policy document outlined that children's services providers should change their practice on three fronts:

- Practice change
- Culture change
- Systems change

The perceived strength of the GIRFEC policy was that there was a legislative context to the document, which outlined that agencies had a legal duty to work together to support children and families. The weakness was that this would put pressure on children's service providers where services were already stretched. The GIRFEC policy was due to be ratified through a proposed 'Children's Services Bill' going through Scottish Parliament in 2007. However, this did not go ahead due to a change in administration from the Labour Government (elected in 1997) to a Scottish Nationalist Government elected in May 07.

The new administration impacted on a number of areas relating to children's services provision including funding and the decision not to go ahead with the Children's Services Bill. The view from the new Government [of the Bill] was that whilst GIRFEC is a key policy objective of the new administration it did not require legislation and that the new administration will only legislate '... where new laws are essential' (McAdam, Scottish Government, 2007c). In addition, the government pledged to reduce bureaucracy and simplify the number of policies and funding streams in local authorities by reducing 'ring fenced funding' and where local authorities will only be required to produce a single report on an annual basis. This will be based on a 'single outcome agreement' linked to agreed national outcomes and local priorities (McAdam, Scottish Government, 2007c). Whilst the 'single outcome agreement' has yet to be finalised, I suggest that this will be helpful for those of us working within children's services.

The impact of this change in policy direction indicates that family support work takes place on the shifting sands of policy and practice change and this has led to different expectations from the various services. The local authority was unsure of what funding they might receive under the new administration's spending review and was cautious about staffing issues. Voluntary agencies were in a similar position and many were reliant on the local authority for funding, so much of the discussion taking place during the timing of my research was about how staff were unsure of their positions within the authority or agency. This affected staffing at all levels from learning assistants funded through Integrated Community Schools Funding: Child and Adolescent Mental Health staff (CAMHS) funded through Children's Change Fund, to new section of staff, Community Safety, funded through Youth Justice Funding etc. This will be explored further in chapter six where I discuss the seemingly 'elastic' nature of family support work.

### **Conclusion to Section One (chapter four)**

In this section I have outlined that family support work takes place in a complex context influenced by local and national issues and change. The impact of all of this 'change' has been both frustrating and interesting to observe and work under. I am sure that this period of change and flux is reflected within the study and it certainly impacted on the time taken for each interview where staff discussed many concerns they had about their own roles and the direction the authority was taking. These changes have had an impact on how I have interpreted the information some months since the original interviews. Silverman (2004) urges researchers to avoid reducing the complexities of the social world to a single variable. In this study I attempted to show the reader that the development of family support work within Pentesk Council has been as a result of a complex mix of circumstances of both local and national policy. The following section discusses another aspect of 'change', the timing of the study and the difficulty I had in accessing respondents from a key stakeholder in integrated children's services for this study.

## **Section Two: Problems Encountered During the Fieldwork**

This section discusses that undertaking fieldwork is not an easy process and I highlight a number of difficulties encountered in this study:

- Timing of the study: unrealistic timeframe
- Problems accessing respondents: non-engagement from a key stakeholder
- Problems engaging families for the study: how to include the views of families

### **Timing of the Study**

In relation to 'timing' my proposal indicated that I would undertake this research during June, July and August 2007. Whilst I was aware it was the time when many people take annual leave, I was fairly confident that I could have completed my interviews within this twelve-week period. This proved to be wrong on a number of levels and this section discusses the difficulties in more detail.

Due to the crisis within the authority and the sheer number of staff leaving social work, it meant that I had to rethink my planned interview list, as professional respondents were not as available as anticipated during the agreed time period (June to August 07). All in all, the interviews with professional staff took place over the period July to September 07 but with a lot of negotiation on my part to re-schedule to suit the respondents (I discuss below the difficulty I had in engaging a key stakeholder in the research). Flexibility is argued to be the touchstone of good research and a number of writers comment that data collection delays should be built into the research process (Denscombe, 2001; Knight, 2002; Silverman, 2004). I suggest that I could have avoided difficulties by building in flexibility within my original plan. On reflection I now believe the timescale I set myself was unrealistic

and that I put myself under pressure to complete the interviews within a very tight timescale. The next section discusses difficulties I had during the interview process.

### **Problems Accessing Respondents**

In my proposal I indicated that I intended to interview twenty people in this study and anticipated gaining the views of a range of staff at all levels, from key stakeholders within the authority and with four families that have been recipients of family support work. This section discusses the difficulties I had trying to gain interviews with one area of children's services involving four members of staff and two families who chose not to become involved in this research. Due to issues of confidentiality I will not identify the agency or families but the following section discusses the issues I encountered in more detail.

In my proposal I had planned to interview four staff from various levels (i.e. operational staff, strategic manager etc) from an agency that works closely with family support workers. Despite numerous contacts with the Head of the Service, I never received agreement to interview them or their staff. I sent off the information to the Head of Service in June 07 and never received a reply. I re-contacted them in August, just in case they had been on annual leave. I also sent information to the Head of Services personal assistant and also asked my Director to raise the research with this person as he had supported me at the EdD review board and had encouraged stakeholders to contribute to the research.

In September, I received word from an operational manager indicating that they were investigating my proposal, as they were not sure that it reached 'ethical standards' for research. This gave me hope that they were considering taking part and as requested, I then sent my full proposal to them so that they could see what I was proposing and how it met the University Ethical Standards Criteria. I asked again in October and was advised that they were still looking into it. I asked again in November and was advised that due to re-organisation no one had the time to look at the proposal. In January 2008, I telephoned and left a message with the operational



manager I had discussed it with previously, but they did not return my call. In February 08, in discussion with my supervisor, we agreed that I should not continue to follow this line of enquiry. We discussed the dilemma where one of the main stakeholder's views would not be included in the study and how this lack of engagement has perhaps excluded the views of four staff that may have wanted to take part in this research.

Whilst my thoughts were around 'why is no one getting back to me regarding this important research? Knight (2002, 161) cautions us that 'novices can be so wrapped up in their own work that they never ask why anyone should be willing to participate and they imagine organizations will give them access...' On this occasion I had not taken into account that the organisation had perhaps made the decision not to take part but did not relay that information to me. Alternatively, I was aware that the organisation was going through re-organisation and due to this; my research was possibly low on their list of priorities. I had to accept their non-involvement and we agreed that as I had access to evaluations from integrated working from both operational staff and operational managers that I would use this information to supplement my data as it is published widely through the authority on an annual basis.

### **Problems Engaging Families**

In a similar vein, I very much wanted to encourage families we had worked with to take part in this research project but initially they were reluctant to do so. I sent off the information and spoke to them by telephone but I did not want to harass them. Two families who had received support in the past and whose family circumstances were now more settled agreed to take part. I interpreted that as meaning that they were happy with the support received and felt they could take part. Two other families were more cautious, they had a higher level of 'need' and expressed concern that this information would be kept confidential. I gave the families reassurance that what they said would remain confidential unless I had concerns regarding child

protection issues. As discussed in chapter three, I could not give guarantees of confidentiality if I was concerned about child protection issues and I made that very clear to the families.

This was perhaps what discouraged them from taking part. Fontana and Frey (2000, 647) indicate that people are less inclined to disclose their 'selves' and choose not to take part in interviews. I very much wanted to gain the views of these families as I know from our own internal evaluation process that these two families were less happy with the supports received and I wanted to include balanced information in this research. However, Knight (2002, 169) suggests that researchers need to bear in mind that research into sensitive issues can be upsetting or harmful for families as it may be 'resurrecting distressing memories ...' I felt that the families had really interesting stories to tell and their case studies could help us to understand the complexity of their lives, but I had not thought that in doing this it may be upsetting for the families. Again, though I did not have information from these two families, it was agreed that I would use information from previous research to supplement the lack of information from parents, children and young people.

### **Conclusion to Section Two (chapter four)**

This section has discussed some of the difficulties I had regarding the timing of this study and accessing respondents to take part in the research and how I dealt with this in this study. My overall ethical position in this study was that no harm should come to those taking part and that those who chose not to take part would not be identified. BERA guidelines (2004, 6) indicate that the researcher must recognise the right of the participant to withdraw at any time without reason. I have done this and have shown the reader how I plan to use information from other areas to supplement any information gaps that came about as a result of this ethical position. The next section discusses the interview process and the way respondents used the interviews for various purposes.

### **Section Three: The Interview Process**

This section discusses my experience of the interview process and how each encounter was different depending on the respondent and their role within the authority. This was undertaken through the examination of four key areas that impacted on this study:

- The interview process
- Personal issues which impacted on the interview process
- A respondents withdrawal from the study
- Challenging interviews.

#### **Interview Process**

Due to the non-engagement described above, I was left undertaking research with fourteen respondents. Three respondents contacted me to indicate that they thought that they would not be the best person to take part but once I discussed the research with them they agreed to meet with me. Four people contacted me prior to the interview to say that they did not wish to be recorded, as they would feel uncomfortable with this method. I decided that whilst taping the interview would have been helpful for me to capture the nuances of the interview it was not crucial to the research (Cohen et al, 2000). I discussed this with the respondents and we agreed against taping any of the interviews and that I would record them by taking notes.

The planned interviews took place in a location chosen by the respondents and although I had allocated thirty – to forty five minutes per interview, they took between twenty-three minutes (one interview) to one and a half hours (12 interviews). One interview was cut short due to personal reasons (discussed below) and one interview took place over two sessions and I suggest that this was due to the respondent using the session to outline the difficulties they thought were taking place within the authority. Alvesson (2002) comments that the interview session has more

than one purpose and that the role of the interviewer and the interviewee are not always compatible. Scheurich (in Alvesson, 2002, 112) argues that ‘the researcher has multiple intentions and desires, some of which are known and some of which are not. The same is true for the interviewee’. What I had completely underestimated in each of these encounters was that each person had a ‘story’ to tell. Within each interview the respondent was giving me an insight to their lives, be it as a manager, operational staff or as a parent.

Bechhoffer and Paterson (2000, 69) argue that ‘...in the interview process that not everything that the respondent may wish to discuss will of interest to the researcher’. I concluded that in this research it was a trade-off between the respondent and me, I required information and to get this I had to be sympathetic to the needs of the respondent. Whilst my questions were bounded around the area of family support work, their concerns were around their own roles as social workers, teachers, managers etc. I argue that this all added to the richness of the data collected. This is said to be one of the benefits of the qualitative research paradigm where ‘the process of being interviewed may produce new insights and awareness ...’ (Cohen et al, 2004, 273). In this case, through listening to the concerns and worries I gained a picture of how legislation, policy and practice had impacted on parents, operational staff, managers and strategic planners.

### **Personal Issues Impacting on the Interview Process**

Personal issues also impinged on the interview process whereby respondents used the interview for a variety of purposes i.e. as a ‘sounding board’ for their concerns; to show that they are powerless within the authority or indeed to show their power. Alvesson (2002, 113) writes that ‘...interviewees may have interests other than assisting science by simply providing information. They may be *politically aware and politically motivated actors*’ in the study (author’s italics). Finlay and Gough (2003, 12) write that the reflexive researcher has to manage and acknowledge the power imbalance between the researcher and the participant and ‘... acknowledge the tensions arising from different social positions’.

In analysing the data it was important that I take into account the 'context' of the interviews. In this study, 5 staff members involved in these interviews were subordinate to me, whilst the other six were senior to me. Bechhofer and Paterson (2000, 98) suggest that the relationship between researcher and respondent can be a double-edged sword and that the respondent might be cautious or wary of the researcher and not trust them to keep confidences. In this study I was interviewing a range of respondents who did not know me personally so there may have been issues of trust. Similarly, there were people who knew me well and this also impacts on the interview process. Alvesson, (2002, 115) writes that 'the interplay between two people with their own gender, age, professional background, personal appearance, ethnicity and so on makes a deep imprint on the accounts produced'.

I argue that these accounts are not a reflection of a 'true' picture of family support work within this authority but my reflections of what the respondents thoughts were, at a given date and time and influenced by a complex mix of feelings, attitudes, hierarchy, policy and day to day events within the authority. For example in answer to the question 'What activities do family support workers undertake?' two respondents answered as follows:

**Unsure**

*'I am not really sure. Where they [family support workers] have been involved they have undertaken a whole lot of activities but I am unable to list them. It is not just about work within the home I am sure about that'.*

(Respondent 7, Fieldnotes)

*'I suppose it might be about providing support but it is very non-specific'*

(Respondent 8, Fieldnotes)

The reason for showing these two views here was that whilst the respondents have indicated that they are 'unsure' what family support work provides, both respondents have been involved extensively in family support work either directly or indirectly. Therefore I have to question their response to this question. As I indicated earlier, this research is not about reporting 'truth' (Hertz, 1997), it is about gathering

information and giving each respondent a 'voice' (Ball in Ozga, 2000), based on their understanding of situations at a given time and day. I am not in any way implying that these two respondents have been anything other than honest in our encounter but as a researcher I have to take into account the research context and other variables such as knowledge, understanding, values, power roles, etc (Cohen et al 2004). This all adds to the richness of the account.

### **Withdrawing from the Study**

During the course of one of the interviews one of the respondents (no. 14) received a telephone call, which led to them having to terminate the interview. When I later sent them the transcript of the interview, the respondent requested that due to them terminating the interview they did not wish me to use the transcription from that day, as they were not sure they had 'given the interview their best shot'. I was extremely disappointed as I felt that the respondent had given some really good insights to the role of family support work and the information I had obtained from them could be used in this research. However, I had to respect their decision and under the BERA guidelines (2004, 7) where they state that participants have the right to withdraw and that '... decisions to persuade them must be taken with care'. In this case I offered to re-interview or discuss further but the respondent indicated that they were not in a good place at that point in their life. Despite my disappointment, I have not used any of the respondent's information in this research and this again provides 'evidence' that I have behaved ethically within this study. Another aspect of the interview process was 'challenging' interviews and the next section discusses how I reacted to these.

### **Challenging Interviews**

Most of the respondents indicated that they were really interested in the topic and came prepared for the interview but I found interviewing people I knew to be very difficult indeed and it was a most uncomfortable experience. Drever (1997) suggests that interviewing someone with whom we share a common experience can be less

daunting, whereas Bechofer and Paterson (2000) argue that the research interview is not a straightforward conversation. I found I agreed with Bechofer and Paterson (ibid) and found the interview process exhausting. Whilst I was attempting to create a situation that encouraged discussion and the sharing of information, I found it very difficult to maintain 'distance' both from the respondents and the subject. However, as Denzin and Lincoln (2000, 291) argue, a critical researcher is not concerned with maintaining distance. I tried very hard not to influence the outcome of the discussion but most respondents were really interested in this research and wanted to know what I intended to do with the research once I had completed it.

Payne and Payne (2004, 131) write that in a semi-structured interview setting the questions and answers are 'actively and freely probed by the interviewer for elaboration'. However, I found that my mind was too active during the course of the interviews and I frequently interrupted the respondent. Fontana and Frey (2002, 647) comment that the use of interviews is taken for granted by researchers and the '... rules and roles are known and shared'. Hearing oneself on tape cutting across a respondent is a salutary experience and I found I had to learn very quickly what my role in the interview process was. After the first two or three interviews I found I had just nodded or made plenty of 'oohs and ums' in response to the respondent and this helped, but I found I was exhausted when the person left. However, whilst most respondents appeared positive about taking part in this research and engaged in an 'interactional process' (Bechhofer and Paterson 2000, 68), two participants agreed to be interviewed but their behaviour in the process left me wondering why they 'agreed' to take part. In the interests of confidentiality I have only identified them as respondent X and Y in this section.

### *Interview Respondent X*

Respondent X was amongst my first interviews and they started by saying they had 'very limited time' so the interview would need to finish quickly. I offered to reschedule but they insisted I continue. When I asked the first question, 'What is family support work? They said they did not find that question helpful and that

family support work is difficult to define and that the local authority was going to commission external research into family support work. I then asked what they thought family support workers did. Again, the answer was that this would be looked at as part of the external research. The respondent then went on to discuss research they had undertaken, as part of a course, which they thought, had been good. I was then advised by the respondent to check some research that had been carried out twenty years ago. I tried to engage in a conversation about the tensions within the role of family support and was advised that this was a 'side issue'. By then I felt that the interview was lost, I felt intimidated and could not get the respondent back on track. The respondent ended the interview after twenty-two minutes and immediately I felt relief then frustration that I had not managed to get the information I wanted.

In reflecting on this encounter I thought about my position (subordinate to the respondent) and given the difficulties within the authority it was not unexpected that someone senior to me might be guarded in their responses. Ball (in Cohen et al, 2004, 123) advises that 'when powerful people are being interviewed interviews must be seen as an extension of the 'play of power' with its game like connotations'. Bechhofer and Paterson (2000) advise that in the classic interview situation it appears that the interviewer has control of the interview; however, I did not feel I had control in this situation. Whilst I reflected that within this encounter power games were being played out, the interview with respondent Y left me feeling altogether different.

### *Interview Respondent Y*

Respondent Y was interesting, in that despite being fairly new to the authority (six months), they insisted on taking part. I offered to undertake the interview with another member of staff who was not new, but this was turned down. I arranged to meet them in their office and after a pleasant preamble i.e. what a nice day, how are you etc, we started the interview. I asked the first question:

**Me**                      What is Family Support Work?



**Respondent** I was interested in your paper outlining this research where you refer to this role but I am not sure I know what this paper refers to’.

**Me** Would you like to elaborate on that?

**Respondent** ‘No’.

**Me** What activities do Family Support Workers undertake?

**Respondent** ‘Again I don’t know what they do’.

I was observing the respondent as they were shaking their foot in an agitated manner and I asked if they were comfortable. Cohen et al (2004, 281) advise that it ‘is frequently the non-verbal communication that gives more information than the verbal communication’. The respondent replied that they were fine so I went on to ask the next question

**Me** What contribution does family support work make to the authority?

**Respondent** ‘I don’t know’.

At this point I felt that the respondent was not engaging in a ‘reciprocal interaction’ (Kvale, in Cohen et al, 2004, 280) so I asked if the respondent wanted to continue the interview. The respondent asked me to turn off the tape and proceeded to tell me that they did not know what family support work was because no one had told them. I asked about their role on various groups where this would have been discussed, the respondent indicated that they thought that there was a power imbalance and that their service was not included in decision-making within the authority. I asked if their lack of decision-making was only in relation to family support work but the respondent indicated that they felt left out of decision-making relating to all

children's services. This surprised me, as my own impression of their service was that they have a very powerful role within Pentesk Council.

This encounter caused me to rethink my view on 'power' roles within the authority. Although the issue of power is a much-contested area (Morriss, 2002, Lukes, 2005), I concluded that '... having the means of power is not the same as being powerful' (Lukes, 2005, 70). I felt that the respondent clearly wanted to make a point but I was left thinking how I would deal with this information. The respondent then went on to discuss the many things they thought was wrong with the authority. I left this interview after an hour a little bemused as to why this person had agreed to take part.

I have to admit that both of these interviews threw me, causing me to rethink my research strategy and wondering what the people expected from our encounter. Drever (1995) advises novice researchers how to avoid 'sticky moments' in research but I felt that these two interviews went beyond this. Mulligan (2001, 40 in Byrne Armstrong) writes that in undertaking research we try to make sense of the chaos around us and this can lead to 'confusion and despair' which can push us off our chosen path. He advises that we should 'expect the unexpected and rely on our core values to make applied ethical judgements ...' At the time, I viewed these interviews as failure, I had not got the 'data' I required for this research. However, three months later, with the benefit of hindsight and discussion with my supervisor, I realised they were part of the rich tapestry of research. Thompson (2001, 164 in Byrne Armstrong) argues that 'negative and judgmental comments are valuable data, which are not to be feared or shunned'. I looked on these two interviews positively and the 'data' collected from them helped me to better understand that interplay between, theory, policy and practice which has impacted on the developing role of family support work.

I have also reflected back on the encounters with all of the respondents and realise that this experience has enabled me to grow as a professional because people whom I thought of as being 'powerful' are also struggling with the integrated children services agenda and the confusion around the development of family support work.

One manager commenting on integrated working (in Peri 6 et al, 2002, 136) reports that 'The work involves battling all the time'. Many of the respondents in this study indicated that this was how they were feeling and where the shifting boundaries of their roles left them feeling powerless or powerful depending on their placing within the authority. I will return to this issue of power in chapter five where I examine the power dynamics of the Integrated Children's Services Group.

### **Conclusion to Section Three (chapter four)**

This section has discussed the difficulties of the interview process and the pitfalls that can happen to a researcher. I argue that by being aware of the complexities of the interview process that it gives the reader an understanding of the level of detail that I have undertaken within this study. McCormick and James (in Cohen et al, 2004, 141) argue that '... reflexivity requires researchers to monitor closely and continually their own reaction, roles and biases and any other matters that might bias the research'. As a reflexive researcher I did not want to 'hide' anything from the reader. I wanted to show that the problems encountered have been used as a source of information to explore the development of family support work within the authority. The following section discusses another aspect of reflexivity, interview feedback where the respondent sees what the researcher has interpreted from the interview process.

### **Section Four: Interview Feedback**

I completed all of the interviews by the end of September 07 (apart from the six interviews discussed above) then I took three months to write up notes and re-check the tapes and notes from each interview. During the course of the interviews with the two families involved in this research I asked for their written permission during the interview to include their case studies in this research. I also discussed with them at the end of the interview what I thought the key points were from their interviews so that they could correct any misinterpretations at that point rather than by me contacting them later. In this way the data collected from the family interviews was completed on the day. With the professional staff I recorded the interview (where

appropriate) and also took notes. From this I then summarised each interview. As discussed earlier, I only intended to record what I judged were the main points in each interview rather than a verbatim transcription due to my chosen methodology and limitations such as timing and costs and the fact I was also using notes.

Once I was sure I had captured the essence of each interview, the respondents 'voice' I then sent a copy of the notes to each of the professional participants so that they could see my interpretation of the interview (see appendix 2.). It was important to me that the respondents got feedback from the interview stage although this was not promised to them when they agreed to take part. I argue that by adding this procedure to my process it allows the reader to see that I have followed ethical standards to a high level and made clear my interpretation of the interview with the respondent. This is argued to be one of the strengths of qualitative research and critical theory paradigm that we are listening to and including the voice of the participant within our research (Ozga, 2000; Collins, 2003). Alternatively, Thompson (in Alvesson, 2002, 130) is critical of this approach he writes '... there is nothing inherently useful in a multitude of voices or "carnavalesque discourses"'. Whilst Thompson's view acted as a reminder not to 'throw too much into the pot' in terms of this research, it was the voices of the respondents that I was attempting to capture and from these different voices trying to make sense of policy and practice and how this has impacted on the development of the role of family support work.

From the twelve sets of notes sent out to the professionals taking part, only one person contacted me to ask not to be included in the study as discussed above (no 14). Three respondents (no. 1, 2 and 9) phoned me to say the notes were 'fine' but this was the only 'formal' feedback I received. Knight (2002) and Silverman (2004) indicate that it is good practice for the researcher to offer some feedback at some point in the research process. Knight (2002, 170) suggests that the trust relationship built between the researcher and the respondent can be strengthened by, '... inviting participants to edit transcripts, to add to them as well as to remove sections, that, on reflection they do not wish to be used'. I was happy to engage in this process and was willing to negotiate my interpretations with the respondents but it appears that

due to the lack of feedback to me that the respondents had ‘trusted’ my interpretation of the interview. With each invitation to take part in this project, I had offered the respondent an outline of the research, offered confidentiality and that no remarks reported in this research would be attributed to them (see appendix 1). I have made an assumption that through offering these guarantees the respondent had agreed to take part through ‘informed consent’ (BERA, 2004; Silverman, 2004) and due to this I have used their information in this research.

On the other hand, had this been parents who had not got back to me, I would have taken a different view as the information they were sharing with me related very much to their personal circumstances, their behaviours and concerns about their children. Knight (2002, 171) advises that in developing a trust relationship ‘...the researcher’s interactions with each participant can be different and that enquiry can take different shapes in different research settings’. In this case I would have treated the parents input differently and put further effort into securing their permission before using their information in the study to ensure they were fully aware of my intentions and knew how I was going to deal with the data they gave me.

### **Conclusion to Section Four (chapter four)**

This section has discussed interview feedback and how I had built in a feedback mechanism for the respondents in this study so that they had the opportunity to comment on my reflections of their ‘voice’. Despite an overall lack of formal response I have used their information in this study as the respondents had been given all of the information before they attended the interview and that they had agreed to be included through ‘informed consent’ (BERA, 2004; Silverman, 2004). I also discussed that had I not received feedback from parents I would have made more effort to secure their consent, as the parents were talking about their own personal lives and difficulties they had in issues such as relationships, parenting etc.

## **Section Five: Data Organisation**

In chapter three I outlined the processes I utilised to undertake the fieldwork in this study. This section discusses how I made sense of the information contained in the interviews and turned this into data for this study. This section explored two key areas:

- Data analysis – looking for ‘first’ and ‘second’ order principles (Knight, 2002, Munn, 2006) and the process of ‘data reduction’ (Miles and Huberman, 1994)
- The key themes which emerged from the data reduction process:
  - Tensions between early intervention and higher tariff work
  - Family support work as a refocusing of welfare services
  - Skills and qualifications of family support workers
  - Lack of parental involvement in the development of the family support work

The section concludes that the data handling and reduction process whilst laborious, presents the researcher with exciting opportunities to engage with their data and to explore accounts or reasons for particular things happening. In this case, I was exploring the development of family support work within Pentesk Council and what influenced or hindered this development. The key themes that emerged were identified through a robust process of engaging with the data and linking this to theory, policy and practice and looking for explanations.

Cohen et al (2000, 282) suggest that qualitative research interprets data through a reflexive process between the researcher and the data. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argue that this is one of the seminal parts of the critical theory paradigm. They state that the ‘domain of interpretation of information’ is often a neglected area and that the critical researcher must link their research ‘to the relationship between critical

hermeneutics and knowledge production' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000, 285). I understand this to be that there is no objective 'truth'; I have interpreted the information, but am aware that my interpretation can be contested by other perspectives on the same phenomena. All of the people involved in this research had different experiences and each respondent promoted a different contextualised 'truth' in answer to the research questions. Silverman (2002, 122) describes data as a 'documentary on the gritty reality of people's lives'. In this approach '... confessional stories are gathered and presented to the reader as new 'facts'...' Following his advice, I have attempted to create a balance between the 'stories' told by the respondents and my attempts to provide a plausible account of the data based on my own knowledge, interrogation of the literature, examination of theory, scrutiny of policy documents, etc. This is all brought together in developing categories and searching for meaning.

Drever (1997, 60) states that 'the main aim in data preparation should be to make the material manageable, while at the same time retaining as much of the original material as possible avoiding distortion'. I decided that for ease of data organisation that I would analyse the data from the professional staff separately from the interviews with the two families. This was due to the fact that the parents were asked different questions and that I could also use the information from the parents to act as a contrast with the data from the professional staff. The families also agreed that I could use their information as 'case studies' within the research to illuminate their concerns and satisfaction as service users (this will be discussed further in chapter five).

For the purposes of ensuring confidentiality, I took the decision not to identify the different layers of staff involved in this study as the 'label' of operational manager, senior manager, social worker, family support worker etc. might make the respondent more easily identifiable. Miles and Huberman (1994, 293) advise that the researcher must be careful during report preparation as 'Local people nearly always can tell (or will assume) who is being depicted'. My intention was that this research would contribute to some form of change within Pentesk Council and I intended to

share some of my findings with staff within the authority, it was therefore essential that my respondents remain anonymous.

However, in adopting this ethical stance I have found that it has caused me difficulties in my analysis. It might have been easier to show where some respondent's views have come from i.e. if I could have commented that say 'senior manager from service 'A' took the view that family support workers worked at lower levels. Or that all of the respondents from 'X' service held the same view that family support workers worked at higher levels, but I felt with such a small study that people could be easily identified and that there was no methodological certainty that with such a small sample any respondents views related to their service location or seniority. Indeed, I found that staff from a variety of agencies and positions of seniority held different views of family support work and that this depended on their relationship to the proposal that sought the funding for the new family work service (see chapter five).

In order to try to make the information from professional staff manageable I transcribed all of the interviews from the recordings and notes and then divided the quotes on an 'Excel' spreadsheet into sections based on the original interview questions (see appendix 3). As the purpose of this study was not in undertaking 'conversational analysis' I did not undertake 'verbatim' transcriptions (Agar, 1980; Silverman, 2004). Instead I listened to each tape recording (where appropriate) and linked this to notes made during the interview. Each question then had all the respondents' answers at a glance. I then kept a copy of the original data and worked with duplicate copies, checking the information for key themes emerging. Once I had the data recorded I then followed the work of Knight (2002, 73) who advises that data can be analysed at different levels of complexity.

Using this as a 'blueprint' I then analysed the data as 'First Order Principles', followed by 'Second Order Principles' described by Knight (2002) and Munn (2006). First order principles involved initial exploration of data; to see what the respondent's thoughts were using their own words in response to the semi-structured



questions. Second order principles were explored by reflecting on the interpretation of the data (Knight, 2002) and linking this to policy, theory and practice and my own experience as an integration manager to begin a process of explanation building (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2004).

### **Data Analysis: First Order Principles**

First order principles were explored using two methods, initially exploring the data using respondent's own words to find similarities and differences in the data and looking for key words that emerged (i.e. early intervention, child protection, etc). These key words were then used as 'codes' and I then reconstructed the data horizontally and vertically and this let me see the data represented as a series of charts (see examples, appendix 4). This then allowed me to compare and contrast the data, to cross check answers and see if I had missed anything out or included something in error. Atkinson (in Silverman, 2004, 147) describes coding as 'an approach that disaggregates the text (notes or scripts) into a series of fragments which are regrouped under a series of thematic headings'. I looked for differences or similarities described by the different levels of staff taking part in the study i.e. did the directors and heads of service have the same view as operational managers or staff involved in the study? I then looked for explanations for these differences in views both at a local level and from literature.

Silverman (2004, 147) urges caution in the coding of fieldnotes; he states that 'whilst grids are useful in organising the data analysis, it also deflects attention away from uncategorized activities'. Glaser (in Punch 2000, 222) is concerned that in segmenting the data in this way that we risk what he describes as a 'culture of fragmentation'. Using this method is also closely linked with the more 'scientific' positivist traditions of research (Knight, 2002; Silverman, 2004). Collins (2003, 72) writes that '... typically any account of critical theory begins with its rejection of positivism ...' however, I strongly argue that I was using this 'scientific' construct differently. This method allowed me to organise and get to know my data in different ways to see what has been said from different perspectives etc. Alvesson (2002, 91)

writes that the ‘research then becomes a matter of defamiliarization, of observing and interpreting social phenomena in novel ways compared to cultural dominant categories and distinctions’. Using these grids helped me to stay on task and to begin the next stage of the analysis process exploring ‘second order principles’ (Knight, 2002; Munn 2006).

### **Data Analysis: Second Order Principles**

From the initial stage of coding my data I then began a process of ‘data reduction’, reducing the data even further. (Knight, 2002; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2004). This was undertaken through a manual process of coloured post-it notes and a flip chart. As a visual learner this let me see the data represented as colours and allowed me to make changes fairly easily. The flipchart was also left up in my room over a period of time so it meant that I could review where I had placed the data. The codes I had applied initially, related to the respondents own words, this next stage involved looking at those words, giving them meaning and looking for explanations as to why the respondents held particular views. Miles and Huberman (1994, 10) state ‘... it is not the words themselves but their meaning that matters’. This process was undertaken by linking the codes I had assigned earlier to other categories (i.e. management issues, understanding of policy, refocusing of welfare etc) then exploring this through literature, theory, policy and my own experience as a manager.

Silverman (2004, 85) suggest that there are five areas to explore with data:

- Chronology – looking at the process of change
- Context – how is the data contextualised within the organisational setting
- Comparison – finding ways of dividing data into different sets
- Implications – think about how the data relates to broader social processes
- Lateral Thinking – try to explore the relations between diverse models

Using Silverman's model described above and the process of data reduction I found that the information obtained during the eleven interviews with professional staff showed a diversity of understanding of what family support work is and what was provided under the heading of family support work. Munn (2006) describes this as looking for 'second order principles', whereas, Knight (2003, 182) describes this as the process of 'developing and reflecting on interpretations of the data'. Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2000, 395) describe this as 'crystallization' where the researcher frames and reframes the research to '... deepen understanding of what is going on in the study'. I used this reframing to explore the key themes in more detail in order to gain a better understanding of the development of the role of family support work within Pentesk Council.

### **Conclusion to Section Five (chapter four)**

Ball (in Ozga, 2000, 128) describes data as 'polyvocal' where it can be interpreted in different ways. I have shown here how I used the interviews to undertake the initial interpretation for 'first order' principles, and then used the same data to deepen my understanding of what is going on within Pentesk Council into 'second order' principles. I argue, that unlike Thompson (in Alvesson, 2002) who suggested there is nothing useful in a multitude of voices, that this research has in fact produced 'thick descriptions' of the role of family support work within the authority (Stake, 2000, 439). From these thick descriptions and a process of data reduction the following themes emerged:

- Tensions between early intervention and higher tariff work: The lack of clarity of the terminology which influenced the development of the family support work role
- Family support work as a refocusing of welfare services: An exploration of the issues that helped or hindered this process

- Skills and qualifications of family support workers: An exploration of the perception that family support workers had low-level skills
- Lack of parental involvement in the development of the family support work role and how they have experienced the service, which had competing demands made of it

These key areas will be explored further in the following chapter and will show that family support worked has emerged from a very complex process of societal, governmental and policy change coupled with local interpretation.

## **Section Six: Limitation of the Study**

Whilst the findings of this study reflects some of the contemporary issues in the development of family support work within Pentesk Council this study had some limitations:

- The sample size
- The changing nature of the study
- The perceived strengths and weaknesses of my approach

The sample size in this study is very small and I have indicated above how I was unable to engage a key stakeholder, which meant that I could not interview four members of staff from that service. I also discussed how I was unable to engage two parents within the study. I indicated earlier in this chapter that another respondent withdrew from the study. This then left me undertaking research with eleven respondents and two families instead of the twenty interviews I had planned. In chapter three I indicated that a study could stand or fall due to the sampling strategy (Cohen et al, 2004). I argue that despite the reduction in numbers taking part that this study has not been compromised by the lack of people taking part and does reflect many of the local issues in a wider context due to the focus being on the respondent's

personal experiences. However I was very careful in the claims that I made due to the small sample size.

I discussed above the changing nature of the study due to political and policy changes; the poor child protection review and the difficulties encountered during this research. I have also discussed throughout this study the shifting sands in which family support work has taken place and I anticipate that I have incorporated many of these 'shifts' into the study but it may well be that someone reading this might point out that I have not included key information. Rather than viewing this as invalidating this research I consider that it acknowledges that it is impossible to include everything when undertaking research (Knight, 2002; Silverman, 2004).

The key strengths in my chosen approach, a case study within the authority was that I had easy (or easier) access to staff within the authority and there was a 'boundary' around my chosen research (Cohen et al, 2004; Punch, 2000). Similarly, I also knew the 'systems' in operation and this privileged position gave me access to staff, policy documents and 'internal' discussions and agreements that might never come to light in external research. A recent funded study carried out by a national organisation into 'Parenting and Family Support' within Pentesk Council had a very poor response to their mixed methods approach. Only seventeen people responded to their questionnaire and very few people attended their focus group. In comparison to that study's difficulty, my study was relatively straight forward. I concluded that there were strengths to undertaking research where one knows the area or people. Similarly there are also weaknesses in such an approach.

There are weaknesses in being so 'close' to a problem and I indicated above that I found it difficult interviewing people I knew because there were different expectations from different staff (Bechhofer and Paterson, 2000). When interviewing one or two respondents in more powerful positions I felt intimidated, whilst some of those subordinate to me, clearly wanted to air their concerns with me with an expectation that I could move them forward (Alvesson, 2002; Finlay and Gough, 2003). Similarly, there is an expectation from the authority that this research will be

shared across agencies (they are funding my study). I have no problem sharing the main findings but do not feel at this stage I want to share it all. Up to this point it has been 'my' study with my ideas and views (shared of course with my supervisor) now it moves to the next stage, where a range of audiences examine the findings (not least an external examiner). This study has highlighted tensions between departments within the authority so sharing the full study might have unsavoury political consequences. As indicated in chapter three the BERA Guidelines (2004) indicate a researcher has the freedom to report their findings honestly but I question whether they will be welcomed under the current climate. My hope is that I will be able to deal with the responses in a non-judgmental way because the study has enabled me to understand the politics of my own situation better and to reflect on the pressures that all managers in children's services experience.

Despite the concerns, limitations and difficulties endured during the study, I have concluded that this research has provided valuable data on the development of family support work within Pentesk Council. I also think that it has the potential to contribute to wider discussions on the 'refocusing' of children's services agenda within Scotland that will be discussed further in chapter five.

## **CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER FOUR**

In this chapter I have reflected on the limitations of this study and found that despite the difficulties, strengths and weaknesses of my approach, this research has provided valuable data for my thesis. The research has shown that there is not a single agreed definition of family support work within Pentesk Council and that family support work within the authority is vulnerable to sudden changes of direction without clear rationale or underpinning philosophy. The fieldwork has also shown me that undertaking research is a difficult and complex exercise but it is the exploration of the various elements and difficulties that makes it such an exciting and worthwhile activity. This chapter has explored a complex mix of policy, practice and theoretical perspectives, which have impacted on the fieldwork element of this study. When I put together the proposal and discussed it at the University board in May 2007, I had

no idea that there would be so many ‘changes’ taking place over the duration of the study. The child protection report; a rapid turnover of staff; a newly elected Government and new policies have all impacted on staff within the local authority. This coupled with difficulties gaining access to a key stakeholder and parents have also had an influence on this study. However despite the difficulties, I was able to extract data from the problems encountered during the study and link this to information gathered from the respondents to create a rich tapestry of ‘data’ for this study.

I have explained how the ‘data’ was separated into themes by exploring the interviews for ‘first and second’ order principles (Knight, 2002; Munn, 2006) and how this involved setting up a coding system that linked the respondents’ words to theory, policy, practice and my own experience. Four key themes emerged from this process:

- Tensions between early intervention and higher tariff work: The lack of clarity of the terminology which influenced the development of the family support work role
- Family support work as a refocusing of welfare services: An exploration of the issues that helped or hindered this process
- Skills and qualifications of family support workers: An exploration of the perception that family support workers had low-level skills
- Lack of parental involvement in the development of the family support work role and how they have experienced the service, which had competing demands, made of it.

These four themes are discussed in more detail in the following chapter where I examine further how theoretical, political and practical change influenced the development of family support work within Pentesk Council.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Data Analysis: Second Order Principles**

In the previous chapter I discussed ‘first and second’ order principles (Knight, 2002; Munn, 2006), exploring the data using the respondents own words to look for commonalities and difference in the data. This chapter discusses my findings from the data through the ‘voices’ of the respondents (Alvesson, 2002; Hertz, 1997). From these voices I then looked for responses, which illuminated a particular area, or responses that were similar or diametrically opposed. My role as the researcher was to try to understand the ‘subjective world or human experience’ (Cohen et al, 2004, 22) to begin to make sense of all these data. I rechecked the data and looked for ‘second order principles’ (Knight 2002; Munn, 2006) and linked this to theoretical perspectives, policy and own experience to see if I could then begin a process of explanation building. Through this process of data ‘reduction’ (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 2004), four key themes emerged from the initial data analysis:

- Tensions between early intervention and higher tariff work: the lack of clarity of the terminology which influenced the development of the family support work role
- Family support work as a refocusing of welfare services: an exploration of the issues that helped or hindered this process
- Skills and qualifications of family support workers: an exploration of the perception that family support workers had low-level skills
- Lack of parental involvement in the development of the family support work role and how they have experienced the service, which had competing demands, made of it

The following sections discuss these themes in more detail with a view to illuminating the difficulties in establishing a new role for staff in modern welfare delivery.



When using respondents 'voice' as data, Alvesson (2002, 15) advises that a number of people saying the same thing 'does not mean that one comes any closer to robust knowledge ...' However, I argue that the voices in this study helped to create a better understanding of the development of the role of family support work within Pentesk Council. Hertz (1997, xii) advises that the respondents 'voice' is filtered through the researcher and decisions to '... privilege some accounts over others ...' can be detrimental to any study. I anticipate that the reader will see that I have chosen a range of views, which highlight key areas of tension in relation to the role of family support work within Pentesk Council rather than choosing views to suit my own analysis of these tensions.

The initial analysis of the interviews (first order principles) indicated that there were a number of views on the role of family support work and its place within children's services delivery. These included;

- There was no shared view of the role of family support work
- There are a diversity of activities carried out under the heading of family support work
- Family support work was viewed by some as filling a 'gap' in services
- There was no strategic context for evaluating family support work
- Family support work is viewed by some as being subordinate to social work
- There was no clear view of the contribution family support work makes to child welfare
- The future of family support work within Pentesk Council was unclear

These views were not necessarily shared between each profession or indeed between the differing layers of management taking part (due to the restricted word count I summarised first order principles in appendix three so that the reader can see how I

arrived at the key themes discussed below). I concluded that the data collected within one local authority very much reflected the literature where family support work is being delivered but there is no agreed definition or clarity of role (Chaskin, 2006; Dolan et al, 2006; Gilligan, 2000).

The eleven respondents in this study described family support work as being; a service; an approach; a process; working with families in a positive way etc. The respondents also talked about their understanding of what was being delivered under the heading of family support work. This included: assessment; report writing; casework; individual work; family work; parenting work; practical assistance in the home; working in partnership with other agencies and developing programmes across the authority. This diversity of provision is also reported within the literature (DfES, 2004; MacDonald and Williamson, 2002; Statham and Holterman, 2004; Williams, 2004).

This chapter explored the themes identified in greater detail to look for common patterns, themes, gaps or unexpected outcomes from the data, for example, the respondents viewed family support work as a low cost initiative, yet this was not the case in reality. I compare these patterns, themes or gaps to current literature on the subject to examine whether there are similarities and differences between my research at a local level and what is going on at a national or international levels. Munn (2006) describes this as looking for 'second order principles', whereas, Knight (2003) describes this as the process of reframing the data, thinking about it differently. I used this reframing technique to explore the key themes in more detail in order to gain a better understanding of the development of the role of family support work within Pentesk Council.

Through the exploration of the themes I found that within the original bid for funding to the Scottish Executive in 2002, there appeared to be a strong desire to refocus welfare provision within the authority but that this has been eroded over the last four years due to a range of issues including: Power roles and positions of agencies within the Children's Services Planning Group; Lack of shared understanding of roles and

processes within integrated children's services agenda; A key stakeholder, Social Work's, withdrawal from service delivery. These issues have led to tension across the authority and children's services and have impacted on the development of family support work. This has left family support work in a vulnerable position within children's services, open to changes in direction without a strategic overview or an understanding of how this has impacted on the staff delivering the service and the families who receive this service.

This section highlights that the family support work role was never clearly defined and fell into a political arena where different services fought against each other and therefore had vested interest in family support work succeeding or failing. Family support work lacks a clear profile and was viewed by some respondents as a low cost, low skill approach to welfare rather than a robust refocusing of welfare provision within Pentesk Council. This lack of strategic direction and profile has left family support work within the authority open to sudden changes of direction without a clear remit or role. This has impacted on the staff delivering family support work and left them feeling that the family support work role is not valued. In the following section I discuss how different understandings of 'terms' used in the area of child welfare has impacted on the development of family support work.

### **Section One: Tensions Between 'Early Intervention' and 'Higher Tariff' Work**

A key theme, which emerged during the data analysis, was that all of the respondents mentioned 'early intervention' at some point during the interview process but there were very different views of what this might be. Respondents also discussed a 'shift' to 'higher tariff work' but again there was no shared understanding of what this might be. The importance of this section in relation to the development of family support work lies in the exploration of 'how or why' the respondents held particular views. This section explores three key areas:

- the lack of clarity around the term 'early intervention'

- the lack of clarity around the term ‘high tariff’
- Vignettes highlighting different perceptions of the terms above

Through this exploration, there was acknowledgement that a ‘shift’ to higher tariff work had taken place but there was a view that family support work encompassed ‘low level’ or ‘lower’ level skills. This section re-examined the data in order to gain a deeper understanding of the diverse views of the respondents concerning the purpose of family support work and the tension between early intervention and higher tariff work. I discuss how respondents may have arrived at their understandings through their own professional background, position within the authority and knowledge of policy and practice. The section also discusses the lack of shared understanding of the level of skills and training that family support staff has within the authority. The section concludes that there appears to be similarity between this study and the literature that the work carried out by family support workers encompasses a diverse range of activities.

## **Early Intervention**

This section explores this lack of clarity in the role further where terms such as ‘early intervention’ and ‘higher tariff’ are used by the respondents yet there is no shared view on the terms or what this might mean for the development of family support work. The initial review of the data showed:

- There was no shared view of the role of family support work
- There are a diversity of activities carried out under the heading of family support work
- Family support work was viewed by some as filling a ‘gap’ in services
- There was no strategic context for evaluating family support work

- Family support work was viewed by some as being subordinate to social work
- There was no clear view of the contribution family support work makes to child welfare
- The future of family support work within Pentesk Council is unclear

Adding to this confused picture of family support was that most of respondents in the study alluded to family support work being ‘early intervention’ but this had different meanings to the various staff involved in the study (Respondents 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 12). I suggest that this may have been influenced by their position within the authority, their knowledge and understanding of the refocusing agenda, their own professional background, societal issues, funding constraints, policy issues etc. (MacDonald, 1995; Ozga, 2000; Schon, 1987). The following section explores the theme of early intervention through the respondents’ views. It is anticipated that the reader will be able to see a range of interpretations of the term ‘early intervention’ within Pentesk Council. I suggest that the following respondent appears to have a clear idea of what they see as early intervention:

### **Early Intervention**

*‘Working at a very low level; it was not crisis intervention, it was working with families as early as possible’.*

(Respondent 2, Fieldnotes)

In a similar vein, respondent 12 describing early intervention;

### **Prevention of statutory involvement**

*‘There has to be clear water between the family support worker role where they were engaged in working with families much earlier to prevent statutory involvement’.*

(Respondent 12, Fieldnotes)

*'I think it is at the more practical level where family support work takes place, it is at the early stages of intervention and it is more intensive work with less statutory involvement'.*

(Respondent, 6, Fieldnotes)

These respondents outlined a fairly clear view of early intervention within the authority and suggest that family support work takes place within the context of non-statutory intervention, which is prior to social work or the Children's Hearing System becoming involved.

In exploring the literature there is no concise view of what is meant by the term 'early intervention' although Russell (in Carpenter, 1997, ix) argues that the term emerged around the 1960s in relation to children with disabilities. Many policy documents and texts discuss early intervention, but rarely do they ascribe a meaning to the term or the term is used so flexibly that it is difficult to work out the exact meaning. The Scottish Government (2007) writes:

*'It is important to make clear that early intervention does not mean early interference by the state at national or local level. A key part of any early intervention policy is building the capacity of individuals, families and communities to secure the best outcomes for themselves. It is about moving from intervening when a crisis happens towards prevention, building resilience and providing the right level of support when problems materialise'*

The Scottish Government (2007c, 4)

This example appears to indicate that early intervention is viewed as avoiding crisis and working to build capacity 'upstream', i.e. working with the child and family during the child's early years. Equally this view of early intervention can be interpreted as working at any time during a child's life as it is about building the capacity of individuals, families and communities to meet the challenges of contemporary society. This is certainly the view contained within many of the Scottish Executive Reports i.e. For Scotland's Children (2001a); It's Everyone's Job to make Sure I am Alright (2002g); Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC, 2005e). These reports have all indicated that services within local authorities need to

work together much earlier in the difficulty to prevent children coming into the statutory sector i.e. Children's Hearing system , Child Protection system.

The local authority concurs with this view and has stated that the role of the integration teams (of which family support work makes a substantial contribution) is to work with children and families 'early in the age and stage of a difficulty' to prevent referral to statutory services. Katz (in Dolan et al, 2006) suggests that family support work is around the prevention of families becoming socially excluded from society. Mirfin-Veitch and Bray (1997) indicate that in their view early intervention is about capacity building with grandparents and extended family of children who have disabilities. Others writers talk about early intervention as working 'upstream' alluding to preventative strategies (Roaf, 2002); a 'needs led' approach where the child and family are at the centre of planning (Anning et al, 2006) and collaborative working where the strengths and limitations of each partner agency is recognised (Carpenter, 1997). From my reading of the literature it appeared that the term 'early intervention' was viewed as;

- Non statutory intervention
- Needs led intervention
- Preventative strategy and crisis prevention
- Capacity building

However whilst the respondents in this study alluded to early intervention approaches most were unclear about exactly what was meant by this term and the vignettes I introduce later on in the chapter show there are clear differences in expectations of the family support work role due to this lack of clarity. I argue that this lack of clarity has impacted on the understanding of the family support work role and contributed to the lack of shared understanding of the role. In a similar vein, there was an acknowledgement in this study that the family support workers had moved to undertaking 'higher tariff' work but again there was a lack of clarity in

what this term meant and the implications for the family support work role. This is explored further in the next section.

## **Higher Tariff Work**

Whilst the above discussion related to ‘early intervention’ some of respondents in this study across the agencies represented reported that in their view, family support work had moved beyond the ‘early intervention’ remit to occupy a place higher up the welfare ‘tariff’ (respondents 2, 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 12). This section demonstrates the view that family support work is working beyond the ‘early intervention’ remit as expressed in the bid the Children’s Change Fund. It shows that there has been no agreement to occupy this space in child welfare and that this has happened by default. However there are implications in adopting this space and the risk of children falling between the two systems of child welfare, i.e. early intervention and child protection and this is explored further in this section. The following respondents indicated a clear shift in direction for the family support work role:

### **Not child protection, yet not early intervention**

*‘Family support work works within the very grey area of work that is not child protection, yet it is not early intervention’*

(Respondent 4, Fieldnotes)

### **Higher tariff casework**

*‘Both family support workers and social work assistants are taking on much higher tariff cases’*

(Respondent 5, Fieldnotes)

*‘We have talked about the issue of social work involvement in the past and the pressure for family support work to take on high tariff work’*

(Respondent 9, Fieldnotes)



### **Different role for family support work**

*'Family support work over the last few years has bridged the gap between education and social work, due to the lack of consistency in social work there has been a bigger role for family support work'.*

(Respondent 10, Fieldnotes)

There was a consensus between operational staff, managers and strategic planners within the study that family support work had moved from an 'early intervention' role to working with children with 'higher tariff' needs. Within the data, there was clear tension between 'child protection' with the focus on investigative approaches and the refocusing of services agenda towards a safeguarding and preventative role. The poor child protection report (discussed previously in chapter four) has had a huge impact on staffing within the authority and I argue that this has had the effect of pushing the family support work role further along the welfare continuum without any discussion or recourse to any of the planning groups or forums in operation. There was clear evidence that the preventative element of family support work was being lost and that family support workers were becoming more heavily involved in child protection cases. However, like many terms discussed in this study, the terms 'early intervention' and 'high tariff' work are open to interpretation and this was evident from the responses of those taking part in the interviews. This can be seen in the vignettes (from page 116 onwards) where there is no clarity of role for family support work in the referrals made by professionals and the whole area of child welfare is open to interpretation.

In chapter two I discussed the concept of 'child in need' and the move from reactive to proactive welfare approaches (Carpenter, 1997; Leathard, 1997) In this study the respondents did not talk about 'child in need' but used the term 'early intervention' instead. I argue that like the term 'child in need' there is no shared agreement as to what this means and this has caused difficulties between the agencies where social work has defined its role as only working with children with child protection issues, children who are looked after and children with disabilities. As argued earlier in the literature review chapter the whole area around child in need/child protection is subjective and had led some authorities to use this as a rationing mechanism by

narrowly defining their role as only dealing with children with child protection issues (Jeffrey, 2003; McGhee and Waterhouse, 2002; Tisdall, 1997). Under the Children Act (1989) in England and in the Children Scotland Act (1995) they outlined that 'children in need' encompassed a wider understanding of need which went beyond the traditional notion of child protection and single service delivery. They also suggested that having two 'systems' of support for children can lead to the creation of a hierarchy between service providers and can also lead to children falling between the two levels (Dept of Health, 2001; Langan, 1993; Pinkerton, 2006). The Department of Health (2001) report states:

*'Studies suggest that by separating the two systems [child protection and family support] some children have missed the value of early intervention to prevent more intrusive and intensive activity at a later stage. Conversely, some children who need safeguarding because of neglect are slipping through the net of family support services because these services fail to address the importance of safeguarding children's welfare'.*

The Department of Health (in Pinkerton, 2001, 183)

'Child Protection' is one of the main criteria for accessing social work services within this authority, but similar to 'early intervention' the term lacks a concise definition. The Scottish Executive Report 'It's Everyone's Job to make Sure I'm Alright (2002g) states that 'There is no agreed definition of what child abuse and neglect is and definitions have changed over time. Abuse can be physical, sexual, or emotional'. The Messages from Research report (DoH, 1995) and subsequent policies have all highlighted that child protection services on the whole provide reasonable support for children and young people who are subject to Child Protection Orders (Glennie, 2007; Pinkerton, 2006). However, where children are not subject to Child Protection Orders is where much of the tension arises, when services are not put in place to prevent child protection issues or services do not engage with the 'child in need' debate.

Alongside the lack of clarity regarding the criteria for child protection, there is also the lack of shared understanding of the terms 'early intervention' and 'higher tariff'

and the implications this has for family support work. The following section highlights these tensions through the introduction of 'vignettes', which attempt to show the reader of the impact this lack of clarity on terminology has on services. The 'vignettes' are based on real cases referred for family support work. Miles and Huberman (1994, 81) describe a vignette as a 'focused description of a series of events taken to be representative, typical or emblematic in the case you are doing'. I argue that these vignettes illuminate the different expectations of the family support work role and the various interpretations of the terms 'early intervention', 'high tariff' and 'child protection'.

One might take a cynical view that the term early intervention has been used by the referring agency to 'dump' the case on another agency under the spurious heading of early intervention. Indeed Peri 6 et al (2002, 36) writes that the problems of one agency dumping on another can lead to fragmentation of services. Alternatively, one might suggest that agencies within Pentesk Council have not actually had the time or space to develop joint protocols and agreed shared practices. Anning et al (2006, 103) writes '... effective multi-professional teamwork requires procedures that have been developed with the participation of all professionals involved. These procedures become the solid representation of joined up working ...'

I argue that this an important area of this research where the intended outcomes of the For Scotland's Children Policy and the authority's bid to the Scottish Executive, i.e. early intervention, has been superseded within the authority but without an understanding of how this has impacted on staff undertaking family support work. I have deliberately not furnished the reader with an outcome of these vignettes and would like to leave them to work out their own understanding if the vignette is 'early intervention', 'high tariff' or 'child protection' depending on their own position, professional understanding, professional values, available resources staffing etc.

### **Family 'A'**

Young Person age 14 referred by social work. Three referrals relating to inappropriate sexualised behaviour by adults towards this young person over the last six months. Three exclusions from school due to aggressive behaviour, two occasions when mum has reported to social work that she has assaulted her child and three referrals by police for the young person being under the influence of alcohol. Social work made the decision that each of these referrals did not constitute 'child protection' work but referred to family support work for 'befriending' then closed the case to social work.

### **Family 'B'**

Long history, (i.e. more than ten years) of social work involvement due to care and welfare issues. All the children in the family have previously been the subjects of supervision requirements, which have now been removed, and some of the children over the years have been placed on the child protection register. Referred to family support work for 'parenting'.

### **Family 'C'**

Child age 4 and Child age 6 referred for 'family support' by Health Visitor for 'early intervention work'. Family support worker carried out assessment and found that mother is seen by Community Psychiatric Nurse due to mental health difficulties, has an allocated worker from Community Drug Service due to 'poly drug abuse' i.e. supplementing methadone programme with non-prescribed diazepam, morphine and other street drugs and is not keeping her appointments with services. None of this was mentioned on the referral.

## **Family 'D'**

Child age 10 referred by Child and Adolescent Mental Health due to concerns that child has suicidal ideation and feels they would be better off dead. The referral indicates that the child has been subject to domestic violence and is scared in their home. The decision is no further action by the CAMHs team and the case is referred for 'support'.

The vignettes here are an amalgam of cases and represent only a tiny fraction of the work undertaken by family support workers but they do illustrate the different views of the terms 'early intervention', 'high tariff' and 'child protection' by agencies. They also reflect the different expectations of the family support work role. I suggest that this lack of clarity and shared understanding has impacted on the role that family support has undertaken within the authority over the past four years. Depending on one's own views of child welfare one may agree or disagree with the intended outcome of these vignettes but they do show that the terms are open to interpretation. However, when I link these vignettes to what the literature indicated was meant by the term early intervention i.e. non statutory intervention; needs led; preventative; and capacity building I argue that none of them are within the spirit of 'early intervention' as described by the authority 'early in the age and stage of a difficulty' (Pentek Council, 2002a). What the vignettes illustrate is that terms such as 'early intervention' and 'child protection' are very subjective and can be used to ration or protect very limited resources as discussed earlier in chapter two (Jeffrey, 2003; McGhee and Waterhouse, 2002; Tisdall, 1997).

The vignettes also highlight the lack of boundary around the family support work role. Each of these referring agencies has indicated that the referral does not meet their criteria for referral but the expectation is that the referrals are appropriate for family support work. In chapter one, I outlined that one of the reasons family support workers leaving the authority indicated was an issue for them was this lack of boundary around their role. Family support workers indicated that they felt 'vulnerable' and experienced a lack of support from agencies as there was an

expectation that family support work was a 'do anything' sort of role (Webb and Villiamy, 2001, 326)

I concluded from the data that this was a key area of tension within the authority. The main area of anger and frustration centred on discussions concerning who delivers what service within the authority and how some agencies have managed to create a boundary around the criteria for access to their services. Beattie (2007, 147) argues that much of this tension in integrated working occurs because '... such initiatives went ahead with little appreciation of how poorly developed our understanding is of partnership work in multi-agency contexts' and I would add that there is little recognition in Pentesk of the impact this lack of understanding has on both recipients of the services and staff involved in delivering the service.

### **Conclusion to Section One (chapter five)**

I have outlined that within this study there was a lack of clarity over the terms 'early intervention' and 'higher tariff work' and this has led to family support work being used to fill gaps in services. The respondents reported that the focus of the work has changed significantly and family support workers are working with families with 'higher tariff' needs. They also reported that family support work is expected to fill the gap left by social work and other services who operate at stage three (specialist provision, see page 161) within the staged support system (Pentesk Council, 2008b) but with little idea on the impact of this on staff involved in this role or families who receive this service.

It appeared to me that there had been no formal acknowledgement of the change of role of family support work within the authority and this coupled with the lack of shared understanding of the role and the lack of a strategic evaluative framework has left family support work in a vulnerable position within the authority. I argue that this has impacted significantly on the family support work role where the intended focus was to work 'upstream' in a preventative capacity has been eroded. The following section discusses the authorities 'bid' to the Scottish Executive and

explores the reasons why the focus of family support work has changed so significantly.

## **Section Two: Family Support Work: A Refocusing of Child Welfare Services within Pentesk Council?**

This section discusses key areas in relation to the refocusing of children's services agenda and concludes that depending on the professionals' relationship to the history of Integrated Children's Services within the authority the views of the role of family support work differs. This section explores six key areas:

- Family Support Work: a Refocusing of Welfare Provision?
- Pressures of Time Limited Funding: leading to 'initiavitis'
- Power Dynamics: Respondents' Location to the Decision-making Process
- Family Support Work as a New Direction: Respondents Understanding of Change
- Organisational Change: Improving Children's Services
- Commitment to Service Change: A key stakeholders withdrawal from integrated working

I show that this complex interplay of power, policy, differing professional values, lack of shared vision etc have all impacted on the view that family support work contributed to a refocusing of child welfare services agenda within Pentesk Council. The section also highlights that attempting to refocus services is not an easy task and that there are competing demands made on services through the lack of 'joined-up' policy from the Scottish Executive.

## **Family Support Work: A Refocusing of Welfare Provision?**

This section of the chapter explores whether the respondents in this study viewed family support work as a refocusing of child welfare services or as an ‘add-on’ to existing provision. The following respondent in this study indicated a clear view that the Children’s Change Fund opened up opportunities to refocus welfare services to better meet the needs of children and families within Pentesk Council:

*‘ Setting the context [for family support work], the starting point was the drive from the Scottish Executive around supporting children in a more integrated way ... Pentesk’s response was to set up a Children’s Services Planning Group to achieve a strategic plan to fit with the Scottish Executive’s expectations. From this group they came up with the idea and title of ‘family support workers’. This group of staff were expected to work within the New Community Schools’ model of working with families in a supportive way. This service would not stigmatise the families it worked with. It would look at the skills and talents of the family and wider community in supporting children. It was to be a preventative, supportive and non-legal based intervention keeping the child and family at the centre’.*

(Respondent 12, Fieldnotes)

This respondent argued that family support work was a new direction in welfare services in Pentesk Council, which would meet the needs of children and families. Other respondents, however, appeared less sure about the role of family support work as a clear change in policy or direction:

### **Family Support Work at the interface between services**

*‘It [family Support work] works at the interface between services and fills a missing link between education and social work. Within schools, family support work is at the interface between pastoral care and families’.*

(Respondent 9, Fieldnotes)



### **Family Support Work as an ‘add-on to existing Services**

*‘...to me it [family support work] appears as an ‘add-on’ rather than viewed as a strategic approach to ensure the emphasis is on keeping the families together’.*

(Respondent 5, Fieldnotes)

What is interesting is that these contrasting views come from different professions and layers of staff within the study and there appears to be three reasons for this; the respondents’ location to the decision making process; the respondents’ understanding of change and the sheer number of ‘initiatives’ emanating from the Scottish Executive.

My starting point for exploring the reasons why respondents appear to have different view on the role of family support work as a refocusing of welfare provision was to return to the original ‘bid’ to the Scottish Executive. In chapter one I outlined that the bid to the Scottish Executive Children’s Change Fund indicated that Pentesk Council was committed to changing the way it delivered its children’s services. The bid document set out the proposal that Pentesk Council aspired to achieve through the development of integrated working teams across the authority:

*‘The Children’s Services Planning Group aspire to develop services which have; early integrated intervention; one door access; a common understandable vocabulary; user choice; prompt response; flexible multi-disciplinary staff able to walk in colleagues shoes as and when appropriate; agreed standards of confidentiality; seamless links with specialist services and smooth transitions as underlying principles’.*

Pentesk Council (2002a, 2)

The task group selected to take the proposal forward was made up of five members of management from the local authority, three from education, two from social work and one member of management from the local Health Board (Pentesk Council, 2002a). It appeared from this proposal that there was a view that integrated children’s services agenda should ‘compliment and add value to core and specialist provision such as Sure Start, Excellence Fund, Health Improvement Fund etc’ (ibid).

Directors and Heads of Service in Health, Education, Social Work, Police, Scottish Children's Reporter and the Voluntary Sector Representative signed up to the 'bid' and in doing so there was to be commitment that all staff from all sectors would work to the remit of integrated working and see themselves as '... strands or components of a single service' (Pentesk Council, 2002a, 3). However, in exploring the 'bid' it strikes me that there are a number of issues for discussion;

- The timescale of the bid and dissemination to stakeholders
- Power Dynamics within the Children's Services Planning Group
- What the bid was requesting

### **Pressures of Time Limited Funding**

The original bid was put together in a rush. A memo was sent to staff on the 11<sup>th</sup> March 02, asking staff to comment on the bid urgently as the 'bid must be in to the Scottish Executive by the 1<sup>st</sup> April and that any comments received by the 14<sup>th</sup> March would be useful' (as the bid was to be presented that day to the full Children's Services Planning Group). Although the memo indicates that there had been discussion with agencies prior to the bid being put together, clearly, this was an unrealistic timescale within which to re-define the way children's services were delivered in Pentesk Council. Some might argue that this unrealistic timescale related to 'implementation games being played' (Bardach, in Hill, 1994, 83). However, I believe that the unrealistic time scale related more to 'initiativitis' (Perri 6 et al 2002, 95). 'Initiativitis' has been defined as occasions when '... public managers were swamped by the volumes of special projects, discretionary funds and the demands to produce plans' (ibid). At this point the Scottish Executive had a whole raft of policy change and initiatives in place i.e. Sure Start, Excellence Funding, Healthy Living Centres, and Childcare Strategy etc. I suggest that within this authority, demands on staff time to rise to the challenge of the various initiatives led to this unrealistic timescale.

I argue that the outcome of this time pressure on the bidding process had the potential to cause conflict and this has impacted on the development of the role of family support work. There was little time to develop a shared understanding of the role and purpose of the service so each agency had their view of what form family support should take and this lack of understanding has continued for four years. Indeed, respondents reported a lack of clarity in the role of family support work where they described:

- A lack of shared view of the role of family support work
- A diversity of activities under the heading of family support work
- Family support work as a service; an approach; a process
- Family support work as a ‘para-profession’

The unrealistic timeframe for the bidding process has contributed to this lack of clarity on the family support work role. I suggest too that the issue of power relations within the Children’s Services Planning Group and the dissemination of information to key stakeholders have also impacted on the development of the family support worker role and this is discussed in the following section.

### **Power Dynamics within the Authority: Respondents Location to the Decision Making Process**

Linked to the unrealistic timeframe was the issue of ‘power’ within the varying levels of staff representation on both the Children’s Services Planning Group (CSPG) and the consultation process. The draft proposal indicated that there had been discussion within the CSPG and with stakeholders at various forums in the period leading up to the submission of the bid. The proposal was sent to; Education, Social Work, Voluntary sector, Childcare and Early Years Partners and Health which at first glance appears fairly representative, but on further examination it emerged that the following staff groups received the draft proposal;

<b>Partnership Centres</b>	<b>Social Work</b>	<b>Voluntary Sector</b>	<b>Child Care /Early Years</b>	<b>Health</b>	<b>Education</b>
Partnership Centres (12)	Practice Manager (2)  Team Leader (6)	Surestart (10)  After School Clubs (8)	Child Care /Early Years (34)	Community Health Rep (1)	Nursery Heads (6)  Wrap Around Care (1)  Principal Psychologist (1)  Support and Reintegration Manager (1)  Primary Heads (36)  High School Heads (6)

It can be seen from this table that education is over represented in this consultation whilst ‘health’ has one member of staff being consulted. Power (2001, 21) writes that this is not unusual in these initiatives that there is a lack of welfare providers other than those in education. However, the health representative only covered one area of health, which involved health visitors and community midwives. They did not cover services such as school nursing service, GPs, child and adolescent mental health, therapy services, hospital services etc. It is argued that health services working within local authority areas tends to be problematic due to the complexity of provision i.e. health authorities; NHS Trusts; Primary Care groups etc which are almost never co-terminus with local authorities (Leathard 2007; Riddell and Tett, 2001).

In writing about Education Action Zones in England and France, Hatcher and LeBlond (2001, 45) state that ‘The composition of the zone decision-making bodies reflects the power relations by which some groups are privileged and others

marginalised'. In this case it can be seen that education services were over-represented and the local authority in general had much more representation than the voluntary groups run by volunteers i.e. after schools clubs, partnership centres etc. Weinstein (in Leathard, 2007, 250) writes that 'the relationship between the voluntary and statutory sectors can be fraught with the voluntary sector being viewed as 'junior' partners'. Hatcher and le Blond (2001) echo this concern and advise that there are varying levels of power within these groups, some have the power to set the agenda and others only participate in the agenda set by others. I argue that the 'power' behind this bid lay very much within the local authority and the statutory sector. However despite these issues, I concluded from the bid that the authority was committed to refocusing their children's service delivery and that family support work was to be a key area of change. This is discussed more fully in the following section.

### **Family Support Work: Respondents' Understanding of Change**

Despite the issues discussed in the previous section i.e. limited timescales, power etc, the 'tone' of the bid was about a refocusing of children's services and a pulling together of existing funding streams to build a coherent response to integrating children's services. Pentesk Council indicated that the bid:

*'... is consistent with the vision for children's services set out in For Scotland's Children. Namely, that all services for children should be seen as strands or component parts of a single service system. Staff must be helped to recognise this and to work within an integrated needs led system'*

Pentesk Council (2002a, 3)

Whilst the funding from the Children's Change Fund was initially for three years the authority took the decision that all the new posts attached to this bid would be permanent. The bid was clear on this point 'if we [the authority] want to achieve change it has to be through the creation of a firm staff foundation and although the funding is time limited we will create posts which will be the catalyst and

campaigners for early integration services through lead and example' (Pentesk Council, 2002a). This was to be achieved through the creation of four integration teams made up of staff within the authority and the creation of new fulltime permanent posts i.e. 2 integration managers posts, the 2 educational psychology posts and four family support work posts and four assistant family support worker posts. The authority had the view that in order to 'change' the way they delivered services they had to do this through hiring permanent staff rather than through time limited contracts. Family support workers were employed on permanent contracts but as discussed in chapter one there has been a high turnover of family support work staff and the purpose of this thesis was to find out the reasons for this.

In taking this step at the very beginning, the authority showed its commitment to refocusing services to staff and service providers. This gave the authority a firm foundation to begin to change the way they delivered children's services through committed and highly motivated staff. Power (2001, 16) suggests that the 'joined-up working policies of New Labour's to address social exclusion had the potential to make some kind of difference provided it can be translated and practiced at local level'. I concluded that at this stage the authority saw the opportunity to address social exclusion through the refocusing of provision and the creation of integrated children's services teams. Family support work was to play a lead role in this creating links with agencies; undertaking joint work with stakeholders; acting as the lead professional on cases and acting as 'boundroids' working across all the agencies. Peri 6 (2002, 74) describes the role of a 'boundroid' as being a staff member with the skills and ability to cross the boundaries of the traditional professions to facilitate integrated working. The space where family support workers within Pentesk Council acted as 'boundroids' was primarily within Children's Services Forums operating throughout the authority. This is discussed further in the following section.

## **Children's Services Forums**

Another way the authority showed its commitment to the refocusing of welfare services was through the setting up of children's services forums within the authority (Pentesk Council 2008c) and the agreement to have a 'staged-support system' across service providers. The multi-agency forums have been signed up to by a whole range of service providers including; school nursing service; therapy services; health visiting; police; educational support services; family support workers; Sure Start; Children's 1<sup>st</sup>. Each agency committed to attending a planned six weekly meeting and to providing support, where appropriate, to children and families. Again, family support workers have played a key role in the development of these forums i.e. working with the stakeholders; initiating joint working; multi-agency working; piloting groupwork and GIRFEC assessments (Scottish Executive, 2005a) within the authority.

These forums have now been operational for over two years and have grown both in the number of agencies signing up to this process for supporting children and young people and in the way they operate. Roaf (2002) cautions that we need to be very careful of such initiatives and that the cost/ benefits of collaboration do not lead to agency 'inertia' described by Huxam (in Roaf, 2002, 39) where the '... progress of the group set up to achieve 'collaborative advantage' slows down compared to what a casual observer might expect it to achieve'. However, these initiatives have continued to grow and are now firmly embedded within the authority's strategic plan (Pentesk Council, 2007b). The multi-agency meetings at Pentesk whilst being dominated by educational referrals (70% with 30% from other agencies per year) have opened up channels of communication and dialogue between agencies and enabled the process of 'joined-up' planning and support for children and young people within the authority. A recent evaluation of the children's services forums reported that there is 'better communication', 'a shared understanding', a 'better understanding of the wider issues families face' and the very strong view that 'no one agency is left to support complex cases on its own' (Pentesk Council, 2008c). However, agencies also reported difficulties in relation to the forums i.e. lack of

resources, lack of shared information systems, agencies not undertaking agreed work etc. On balance, despite the difficulties, the review of the forums system indicated that agencies would not like to see this system revert back to the previous ad hoc approach to children's services (ibid).

Despite this improvement in structure within Pentesk Council there is a concern that this does not always lead to lasting improved outcomes for children. Two fairly recent reports: Sure Start Evaluation (DfES, 2005) and New Community Schools Evaluation (Scottish Executive, 2004) have shown that whilst there is limited improvement within systems it has not led to lasting change within authorities. However, Anning et al, (2006, 127) argue that 'What really matters in the reform of public services and the rollout of multi-professional practice is that the delivery of services for children and families is better than it was, and results in enhanced outcomes for them'. Respondents within Pentesk Council indicated that there had been an impact on children's services delivery and that there had been improved outcomes for children:

### **Organisational Change**

*'What we have to recognise is what we have achieved in a short space of time is enormous organisational change ... this has been a difficult experience and the literature shows that you cannot jump over this step, it is an organisational learning curve and difficult to avoid'.*

(Respondent 2, Fieldnotes)

### ***Family Support Work as a Building Block***

*'I believe that family support work is one of the main building blocks within children's services provision and has more impact than people realise'*

(Respondent 6, Fieldnotes)

Recent inspection reports have indicated that there are good outcomes for children who are discussed and supported through the Children's Services Forums (Pentesk



Council, 2008c). Alongside the children's services forums, the authority and its stakeholders have also committed to a staged intervention process which is discussed further in the following section.

### **Multi-agency Assessment and Planning Groups**

In order to make the children's services forums work more efficiently and to encourage a shared understanding of the needs of children and young people the authority has developed a staged or tiered approach to supporting children and young people who require additional support. They describe a three-stage support model, the multi-agency assessment and planning support system (MAPSS). This incorporates:

- Level One: single services available to a child within the classroom/universal setting i.e. differentiated working, health visiting support, family support work, education welfare officer, etc.
- Level Two: supports available within the school setting/community based health services requiring joint working, i.e. behaviour support, community child health services, family support work, education welfare officer, etc.
- Level Three: multi-agency specialist supports, available outwith the school/community setting, i.e. social work, specialist education, psychological services/hospital services, child and adolescent mental health services etc.

(Pentesk Council, 2008b)

This system has only been put in place fully over the last two years but most services appear to be engaging and contributing to the staged support system. Pinkerton (2001) suggests that whilst frameworks such as these are helpful for all staff involved in delivering support for children, everyone needs to have a clear understanding of the framework and the implications of movement between each level. Wenger (in Anning et al, 2006) describes this process as the creation of 'communities of

practice' where the daily work agencies undertake and the shared experiences all contribute to shared common goals.

This framework has implications for the role of family support work as the family support workers operate within both the locality forums and the staged support system where their remit covers a wide range of provision from level one, universal services through to level three working with children who require more specialist support. However, what is not seen is that the family support worker role was the 'catalyst' for much of this change through 'lead and example' (Pentesk Council, 2002a). Family support workers have worked across the boundaries of health, education, social work and the voluntary sector to show what can be achieved through working together and their contribution to the development of forums and the staged support systems should not be underestimated. However, this key role of 'boundary spanner' (Peri 6 et al, 2002, 109) was not evident within this study.

Despite the very positive steps discussed above, the setting up of the integration teams, the permanent posts for staff, the development of locality forums and the introduction of the staged approach system, I suggest that at this relatively early stage services are working at the 'collaborative' stage in Frost's continuum of partnership working (Frost, in Anning et al, 2006, 6). In this model services are 'working together in a planned and systematic manner towards shared and agreed goals' (Frost *ibid*). This clearly is a refocusing of services and is in keeping with the aspirations of the bid to the Scottish Executive and whilst the services are not fully integrated, I concluded that there has been a commitment to changing the ways services are delivered in Pentesk Council. However, this commitment was not shared by all agencies and the following section shows us how the balance can be easily tipped by an agency's withdrawal from service delivery.

### **Problems with Commitment to Service Delivery**

In this section I discuss how 'agency' and 'structure' impacted on the development of the forums and in turn on the development of the role of family support work.

Whilst the above examples have discussed how the authority has attempted to refocus their children's services it is important to discuss here how one of the lead agencies for driving forward the Children's Change Fund Proposal, Social Work, 'withdrew' from integrated children's services agenda once the funding was secured. I indicated earlier (in chapter four) that Social Work had defined their role early in the setting up of integration teams as only dealing with child protection, children with disabilities and looked after children. There is some irony in a lead organisation stating that all agencies should work towards better-integrated services then indicating that they will have a boundary around their role! I question why this was allowed to happen. However, after undertaking more research around this area I am a little clearer as to the circumstances in which this withdrawal took place and the following section discusses this in more detail.

A recent report for the Association Directors of Social Work (2007) indicated that Pentesk Council had a large deficit due to the disaggregation of local authorities. One of the respondents in this study (no, 1) alluded to the fact that due to local authority disaggregation in 1995, Pentesk Council had lost out on funding to a larger local authority. With this loss of funding, also came the reduction of access to resources such as day centres, young person's centres, leisure facilities etc. This respondent's view was that social work had been underfunded and unable to meet service demands therefore they had to prioritise services to meet their statutory demands, hence the narrow definition of their service. This was also compounded by the poor child protection report (discussed throughout the study), which led to a huge staff turnover, management and structural change and social work undergoing three different types of inspection regime within a nine-month period (Pentesk Council, 2008a).

Another event took place which also influenced the decision to limit the support social work would commit to, the publication of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Social Work Review (Scottish Executive, 2006a). This report defined the role of social work and through identifying the 'reserved functions' of social work and the 'protection' of the social work title. Whilst the report outlined a four tier 'model' of social work input to

supporting children and families it very clearly outlined that social work only engaged and worked at the top two levels:

- Tier 3: Social workers engage in early intervention with people at high levels of vulnerability and risk
- Tier 4: Social workers work directly with people alongside their families and carers where there are complex, unpredictable, longer term needs and risks.

Scottish Executive (2006a, 31)

I argue that this coupled with a rise in deprivation indices within the authority and the problems of recruitment and retention of staff within social work lead to them taking this rather limited view of their service (Pentesk Council, 2007a).

However, whilst social work was delivering on a limited menu of support, the operational and strategic managers within social work were attending the multi-agency meetings and the strategic Children's Services Planning Group regarding integrated working. I argue this was due to Social Work's 'power' within the Children's Services Planning Group, where they hold a large part of the authority budget. Peri 6 et.al. (2002, 43) write that 'a key goal of the professions is always to secure their autonomy in decision-making in their defined sphere'. I suggest that social work has been able to justify their position about their limited engagement in the refocusing agenda and this has gone unchallenged by the stakeholders within Children's Services Planning Group and secured their role within the decision making process.

This section has explored the reasons why social work, a key stakeholder in Pentesk Council appeared to offer a limited engagement within integrated children's services and concluded that the following areas had an impact on this:

- Large funding deficit due to local authority disaggregation

- Impact of the poor Child Protection Report
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Social Work Review which gave social work ‘protected’ job titles and functions
- A secure base within the Children’s Services Planning Group due to their powerful position.

I suggest that these areas have impacted on the development of integrated children’s services within Pentesk Council and through this they have influenced the development of family support work.

## **Conclusion to Section Two (chapter five)**

In this section I was looking for an explanation as to why the respondents had different views on family support work as a refocusing of welfare services across the authority and I suggest that where each individual sits within the welfare sphere may offer an explanation for this. I have shown that the development of family support has been through a complex mix of both local and structural change. I have discussed the following areas that had direct impact on the development of family support work:

- The aspiration of the original bid to refocus services in Pentesk Council
- Power Relationships on the Children’s Services Planning Group
- The dissemination of the bid to Stakeholders
- The appointment of permanent staff
- The development of Children’s Services Forums
- The development of a Staged Support System
- The withdrawal of a key stakeholder from Children’s Services Delivery

The section concluded that each respondent's link to the Children's Services Planning Group would have influenced their understanding of the refocusing agenda. Some respondents may have had a better understanding than others about the aspirations of the 'bid' to the Scottish Executive Change Fund. In Section one and two I discussed that the development of family support work was underpinned by policy and practice change. The aspiration of the bid to the Scottish Executive was to fundamentally change the way services were delivered in Pentesk Council. However, this study has shown that this was not an easy process and that services had competing demands made of them which influenced their ability to effect service change. Ultimately, this impacted on the development of the family support work role where different respondents within the study have indicated a range of views on the family support work role. The following section takes this forward by exploring the qualifications and skills of the family support worker and challenging the view that family support work is a 'low cost' option within child welfare.

### **Section Three: Qualification and Skills of Family Support Worker**

This section discusses the skills and qualifications of the family support workers within Pentesk Council and the apparent 'mismatch' between what the respondents thought was required and what the staff actually hold. The section explores three key areas:

- The family support work job description and the expectations of that role
- The qualifications and skills required for the role
- Family support work as a new direction in welfare services: para profession or emergent profession?

Through the exploration of these key areas the section concludes that the family support work role, whilst viewed by some respondents as a 'para professional' role,

has the potential to become part of an emergent profession in modern welfare delivery.

As discussed throughout this thesis, the respondents in the study alluded to the crisis within social work and the impact in recruiting and retaining staff that had a direct impact on the ability to deliver welfare services. As discussed above, there was acknowledgement within the interviews that changes in the role of family support work from early intervention to working at higher levels of intervention had taken place. Most respondents reported that family support work appeared to be occupying the space in welfare delivery previously occupied by social work. However, whilst respondents acknowledged the change of role for family support work there did not appear to be consensus within the study that family support work required higher-level skills for this role. The data indicated that respondents from all levels thought that family support workers had low level qualifications or that their salaries were lower than that of a social worker. The following quotations show these views quite clearly:

#### **Family support work as subordinate to social work**

*'I see family support work very much as a social work role where the family support worker provides support to the social worker'*

(Respondent 6, Fieldnotes)

*'Are family support workers the same grade as assistant family support worker?'*

(Respondent 7, Fieldnotes)

#### **Family support work, a less expensive option**

*'In the longer term, children's services will require investment and family support workers should be part of this investment. As it is cheaper to provide family support workers rather than social workers'*

(Respondent, 9 Fieldnotes)

These three respondents indicated that they thought that family support work was a cheaper option than providing social workers and that they thought the role was subordinate to the social work role. This was a really interesting area in this study because I concluded from the bid to the Scottish Executive (discussed above) that the role of family support work was not about providing a *cheaper option*, but providing a *different option* of child welfare.

My understanding of the bid was that the authority were looking to create a group of staff who were confident within their own professions and who could act as 'boundary spanners' (Skeltcher in Anning et al, 2006, 105) across health, education, social work and voluntary sector. The expectation was that this group of staff would be key in the refocusing agenda (discussed earlier in this chapter) and take a lead role in developing a new service that would better meet the needs of children and families in Pentesk area. Skeltcher (ibid) writes that '... these individuals start from the problem rather than the procedures. They are adept at managing the procedures, but only because this is necessary in order to gain access to resources that will deliver their objectives'. This group of staff was expected to have confidence and skills to act as change agents in a very complex area with competing demands made of them.

A confusion may have arisen due to there being two levels of family support worker (as explained in chapter one). There are family support workers with degree level qualifications and 'assistant' family support workers with HNC level qualifications. Whilst I am aware of these distinctions a number of respondents appeared unaware of this, as we will see in the next section where there is disagreement about the qualifications and skills of family support workers. The following section discusses this expectation of the family support work role through:

- An exploration of the family support work job description
- An exploration of the qualifications of the family support work staff
- Family support as an emerging profession



## Family Support Worker Job Description

I argue that this mismatch between the respondents understanding of the early intervention role and the responsibilities the family support work role carries has led to family support work being viewed very much as a low skill occupation. The move to fill the space that social work previously occupied has meant that the opportunities to undertake preventative work and capacity building work is being eroded and the role of family support work is being viewed as a 'para' social work role'. I concluded that when the family support work role was conceived the children's services planning group had a clear idea that these posts were pivotal in changing the way that children's services were delivered within the authority. I suggest that the authority shared the same view as some respondents in the Action Team (Scottish Executive 2001) where they state:

*'... some wish to see the replacement of existing professions with a new profession ... the action team regard this as an effort to provide a form of service that is widely seen to be missing from the current service network – workers able to work with families to effect positive change in the lives of children'*

(Scottish Executive 2001b, 6)

I concluded that the authority (at the time of the bid to the Scottish Executive discussed earlier) conceived that the family support worker role required a highly skilled and motivated practitioner with degree level qualifications, who was comfortable within their own profession but had the skills and confidence to become a 'boundary spanner' to make the linkages between the organisations involved in integrated working (Mulford, Alexander, in Perri 6 et al, 2002, 74). It is around this time that the sub group came up with the title of 'family support worker' and the job descriptions and expectations of this role were matched through the salary they received (At the time of writing, family support workers are paid at the same rate as their social work equivalent starting salary of 24k per year. Whilst the assistant

family support worker is paid at the same rate as a social work assistant, starting salary 18k per year).

I believe that at this point it is helpful to here to turn to the family support worker job description with a view to illuminating the role that they were expected to fill. Within the family support work job description it outlines three clear roles for the family support worker:

- Casework and direct work with families
- Therapeutic work
- Capacity building

(Pentesk Council, FSW Job Description, 2008d)

Within these roles family support workers were expected to carry out a range of tasks including:

- Work with individuals or families including assessment, care planning and review
- Develop and delivery of group work programmes i.e. parenting workshops, social skills group work in schools etc
- Develop and delivery of supports within the local community i.e. breakfast clubs, parent support groups etc
- Setting up training for other staff within the authority i.e. anger management, training.
- Deliver therapeutic programmes to children and families i.e. counselling, systemic family therapy etc.
- Develop Opportunities to build capacity within locality areas

As indicated earlier, another key part of the family support worker role was that they were 'expected to model good practice and act as catalysts for change' (Pentesk Council, 2002a). What is clear from this information is that staff undertaking the family support work role were expected to have the confidence and abilities to work within their own professional boundary and across other agencies to create meaningful links, which would benefit children and families. Riddell and Tett (2001) suggest that post war professionals such as teachers, social workers and nurses worked within clear boundaries and to specific working practices. However, I argue that the creation of this new group of staff took on a very powerful role as 'boundroids' (Perri 6, et al, 2002, 74) moving beyond the traditional boundaries of welfare providers and required a high level of confidence and skill to achieve this goal. 'Boundroids' are described as '... people who have the capacity to live between two warring states and sleep easily on the border' (ibid). In this case, the family support workers in Pentesk Council were required to undertake work and to help effect 'change' in practice with key stakeholders such as health, education and social work who had their own professional identities and who had vested interests in maintaining this identity.

Clearly, the expectation of the family support work role demanded a high level of skills and expertise yet this was not reflected in this study. Over half of the respondents viewed family support work as a 'low skill' work. For example Respondent 10 comments;

*'Family support work is not theoretical, it is about providing, practical short-term support, it's what it says on the tin. Family support work is helping a family by acting as an advocate, helping a child to school, supporting issues such as bereavement, listening, helping the family access other services such as befriending or youth work.'*

(Respondent 10 Fieldnotes)

Whilst this respondent has outlined many of the roles of the family support worker I argue that this view of the family support work role is very narrow. I suggest that if

we are asking the family support workers to intervene in children's and families lives then the least we can do is to ensure that the worker has the theoretical and practical knowledge to undertake this role. They need to be aware of the implications of the work they are undertaking with children and families. I suspect that the view of respondent ten is the view that many people have when discussing the role of family support work. Pinkerton (2006, 183) suggests that 'family support work is viewed narrowly as a low status occupation which can only be validated by its capacity to prevent child abuse or reception into care ...' However I argue that the view of family support work as a low skill occupation it is at odds with their actual placing on the salary scale and with the view of the sub group who were involved in the development of the family support worker role. The following section discusses the skills and qualifications required for the family support work post with a view to illuminating why this mismatch has occurred.

### **Family Support Workers Skills**

In the previous section I outlined that the sub group tasked with developing the family support work role were looking for staff who were confident within their own professions and who could act as 'change agents' with stakeholders from other professions. This section explores where this group of staff came from, what their professional backgrounds were and what attracted them to the family support work post. It also outlines that whilst the family support workers felt that there were opportunities to work beyond professional boundaries, they were disappointed with the outcome and many have left to return to 'their own professions'. The section also discusses my concern that due to a lack of clear strategy for family support work that it will be pushed to undertake the 'para-professional' role outlined in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Social Work Review (2006). The report states:

*'We need to develop a new role, that of a paraprofessional in social work services, skilled to a nationally recognised and accredited level and able to work across and between different services'*

Scottish Executive, (2006a, 63)

In this study, plus other research I had undertaken for the EdD course in research methods (Smith, 2006) I indicated that family support workers had come from a range of professional backgrounds including, nursing; community education; psychology, social work etc. Staff held degree level qualifications with most having additional qualifications in areas such as counselling, systemic family therapy, play therapy etc. Within each of the backgrounds of the staff there are certain 'claims' to knowledge, power and control (Carr, 1999; Friedson, 1994; Ozga 2000). Leathard (2007) writes,

*'Traditionally a professional person is associated with control of entry to a particular profession: The requirement to undergo a recognised length of training, accredited and in some cases licensed by an acknowledged professional body. At the end of training the professional is recognised as having a certain expertise that legitimates practioner action'.*

(Leathard, 2007, 6)

I argue that the whole area of professionalism and professional knowledge and power is a contested area (Bottery, 1998; Erault, 1994; MacDonald, 1995; Ozga, 2000; Schon, 1987) due to:

- the development of information systems where claims to professional knowledge are challenged,
- the complexity of divisions of labour within contemporary society and
- the challenge to professionals through new managerialism.

However, recent reports from the Scottish Executive indicates that there is a resurgence in the role of the professions in modern welfare delivery i.e. A Teaching Profession for the 21st Century, 2001; Social Work: A 21<sup>st</sup> Century Profession, 2006; Empowered to Practice: The Future of CLD Training in Scotland, 2003. Whilst it can be argued that these examples are not 'true' professions with autonomy over training and expert knowledge and could be described as 'semi-professions' (Etzioni, 1994). It is clear that the Scottish Government needed the backing and support of the

professions in order to modernise the welfare system. I have concluded that in exchange for this recognition of professional status, the Government and the agencies have agreed to abide by standards of training and professional practice (i.e. Scottish Executive, Key Capabilities in Child Care and Protection, 2006; Standards Council for CLD, 2007; Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics for Nurses and Midwives, 2008).

As indicated above, family support workers within Pentesk Council have come from a range of professional backgrounds and whilst their training background will alert them to their own professional knowledge and standards, their new role as family support workers requires them to work across and between other agencies and their standards. Adams et al (2002) describes this as a complex process which:

*‘requires workers to manage their relationship between own organisation and others (interagency co-ordination) as well as between their profession and others (interprofessional co-ordination) and between their own professional knowledge and values and others (interdisciplinary co-ordination)’.*

(Adams et al, 2002, 253).

There did not appear to be recognition from the data that family support workers required a lot of skills to accomplish this cross boundary working across professions. Staff employed as family support workers indicated that they had been attracted to the post because they thought:

- It would allow them to work holistically with children and their families
- It allowed them to be creative and pro-active in their practice
- It was an opportunity to work in an integrated children’s services team with less ‘silo’ mentality.

(Smith, 2006)

However, what they found was that family support work is not viewed as a new and innovative way of delivering services. Family support workers reported that their work was viewed as a low skill occupation and where their own professional skills and expertise was not valued. They reported feeling 'vulnerable' because no-one was taking responsibility for the family support work role. It appeared that more and more activities were being added to their role without any recognition of the impact of this and I argue that this contributed to the relatively high turnover of staff in the family support work role (discussed in chapter one). Exit interviews with family support workers indicates that staff are returning to their 'own professions' due to:

- Reported loss of professional identity
- Family support workers reporting they did not experience integrated working but a hierarchy of staffing at which their role was at the bottom.
- A fear that due to the complexity of the family support work role, that they lacked protection and were not covered by professional standards

My concern was that these issues coupled with a lack of direction for the family support work role within Pentesk Council has left it in a vulnerable position with competing demands made of it. On the one hand the role was viewed as a 'change agent' where staff was expected to act as catalysts and campaigners for change (Pentesk Council, 2002a). On the other hand, it has been acknowledged both within the study and current practice that family support work is being pushed to fill the gap left by social work.

I discussed in chapter four that an independent consultant indicated that family support work should come under social work management and although this was rejected at that time there are concerns that it may resurface. Similarly, I discussed earlier in the chapter that the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Social Work Review (Scottish Executive 2006b, 63) indicated that there was a need to develop; 'a new 'paraprofessional' role, skilled to work directly and manage cases, under the supervision of a professional ...' I suggest that with family support work being pushed to fill the space left by

social work. I am concerned that the 'paraprofessional' role is very narrowly defined and again overlooks the thresholds where social work will intervene. If family support work within this authority is being pushed to higher tariff work one has to question what or who will undertake prevention and early intervention rather than crisis intervention work.

What is really interesting about this push to fill the space left by social work is that at present, the family support workers within this authority are not registered by the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) and do not look likely to be able register in the short-to medium term. The SSSC (2008, 2) indicate that they have decided to register people under job function rather than job title as 'During the consultation it became clear that there is a wide range of job titles and it was decided to register under job function rather than job title'. The role of the family support workers in Pentesk Council does not fit neatly within the criteria for registration under any of the job functions. They are not mainstream social workers, or early education and childcare workers, or managers or lead practioners or housing support workers yet the family support workers in Pentesk Council cover all of these activities within their remit.

I argue that the family support worker role is not subordinate to a social work role and should not be regarded as a 'para-professional' role. I argue strongly that the skills and expertise of family support workers are part of a movement towards an emerging profession which I will discuss further in the following chapter. I conclude that the Government want to see a new modernised welfare state and that family support work is part of this movement towards getting agencies to move and change their practice to meet the needs of service users, in our case children and families. Schon, (1973, 57) writes that we are living in a state of continuous change and whilst our systems 'need to maintain their identity, and their ability to support the self identity of those who belong to them, but they must at the same time be capable of transforming themselves'. I concluded that the family support work role was to assist the transformation process and whilst family support workers here have outlined that



they have not found working at the boundary of services to be a satisfactory experience. I suggest that their contribution has helped to consolidate the following:

- Children's Services Planning Group
- Locality Forums
- Multi-agency Planning Staged Systems

Having these systems in place and operating well has improved the services offered to children and families in Pentesk Council and the contribution of family support work should not be overlooked. I will discuss in the next chapter how the authority can take this forward to ensure that we have a clear strategy for family support work and discuss the role of family support work as an emergent profession.

### **Conclusion to Section Three (chapter five)**

This section has explored the mismatch in the perception of the skills and qualifications of the family support workers. It has discussed the view that respondents in the study viewed the family support work role as being subordinate to social work role. I outlined that the subgroup that determined the family support work role viewed the role as an 'agent' for change within child welfare services and this demanded a high level of qualifications and skills. The staff that came into to the authority to undertake the family support work role indicated that they thought the post offered opportunities for holistic working. However, due to the lack of clarity around the role and the changing nature of expectations of the role, staff reported a feeling of 'vulnerability' that lead to a relatively high turnover of staff.

The section also explored the push to fill the 'space' in welfare services, previously occupied by social work and the view that family support work should adopt the 'para-professional' role outlined in the Social Work Review (2006). I discussed why I think that the para-professional role should be rejected, as it is too narrow. I also discussed the contribution of family support work to the processes now embedded

with Pentesk Council that have changed the way children's services are delivered within the authority. In chapter seven I discuss whether family support work could be viewed as a new or emerging profession within modern welfare delivery. So far in this chapter I have discussed the findings from professionals involved in the development of family support work the next section discusses what families and young people's views are of family support work.

#### **Section Four: Parent and Young Person's Views of Family Support Work**

In the literature review chapter I highlighted that participation and partnership working between service users and those who deliver services was a key 'shift' in welfare provision. I wanted to explore this area within this study was to see how the respondents discussed the views of parents, children and young people. Whilst the respondents indicated that family support work was about 'supporting' children and families and working 'with' families and I wanted to find out if this was viewed as participation and/or partnership working. The study concluded that at a local, individual case level, participation by children and families was high. However the study did not find that parents, children and families views were viewed as partners by agencies involved in their support or contributed to the development of the family support work service. This section of the chapter has four sections:

- An exploration of partnership and participation which, concluded that parents are involved at a local individual level in service planning but not in any strategic planning.
- A case study of Lucy age 9 and discussion of how the parents and the child were involved in the decision making process
- A case study of Roger age 15 and discussion of Roger's involvement in the decision making process and how the views of young people are not listened to in some statutory processes

- Discussion of what families indicated they need from Children's Service Providers.

The section concludes that there is some way to go before parents are viewed, as a 'partner' in their child's care however, there was a view that parent's participation in services is welcomed and improving. This was not the same for the young person in the case study; he felt that his views were only reflected through the intervention of the family support worker. The section highlights the qualities parents look for in services and on reflection they are not unrealistic and should be what any organisation would want to provide. However, this good practice is not what parents indicate they receive in welfare delivery.

### **Partnership Working or Participation?**

In chapter two (literature review) I outlined that the rhetoric of Governmental policy over the last twenty years had been to include the views of service users in the decision making process (Levitas, 2005; Nixon, 2002; Pierson, 2004). This rhetoric was underpinned by legislation such as UNCRC (1989) and Standards in Scotland's Schools etc 2000 Education Act. This legislation and policy was designed to be a redistribution of power that enabled those who are socially excluded to become included (Levitas, 1998; Davis and Hogan, 2003). It was also seen as a way of strengthening the links between home and school and where the contribution of parents would be valued by the professions (Ryan, 2000; Mordaunt, 2001). Whilst some view this policy and legislation positively, other writers are concerned that the power imbalance between parents and the professions is ignored (Hegarty, 1993; Wolfendale and Bastiani, 2000). Davis and Edwards (2003), notable proponents of the participation agenda, urge us as practitioners to query the whole participation agenda and question what counts as participation, what it is for and how exactly does it impact on social exclusion.

Much has been written about participation but like many of the terms discussed in this study it has many interpretations. Like the rhetoric of parents as partners,

participation of children, young people and their families is discussed extensively but there is a sense that some levels of participation are more welcomed than others. It is argued that that whilst the right to participate by children and young people is enshrined in the UNCRC (1989) that this has not been followed up by robust policy and law. Hill et al, (2004, 92) argue that the outcome of this is that children's voices 'remain generally excluded and participation activities remain under-resourced'. There is also the difference between 'active participation' where children, young people and their families have direct involvement in the decision-making process and 'consultation' where views are sought but not responded to (Davis and Hogan, 2003). Moss and Petrie (2002, 169) on the same theme, write that 'children are quite capable of understanding that some of their ideas cannot be put into practice, or certainly not immediately ...' yet they still value active participation in the consultation process. This study now discusses how families experienced family support work and explores if the families were viewed as active partners or participants in the work carried out.

This section explored the participation agenda through the lens of the respondents and two case studies of families who have received family support. I discussed earlier in this chapter how it was difficult for agencies to assert themselves as equal 'partners' within the Children's Services Group due to the power imbalance. Similarly, I suggest that it is even more difficult for parents to regard themselves as partners when they have very little power in the decision making process. I concluded from the data that whilst there was little evidence that parents and children are viewed as 'partners' in welfare provision, there has been a movement towards greater 'participation' by parents and children through the refocusing of welfare services described earlier in this chapter. There is also evidence from the case studies that the parents and young person involved discussed a high level of participation in their own planning processes but that the young person's views had to be given by the family support worker acting on his behalf.

On re-examining my data I found that respondents in this study did not indicate overt participation in a partnership arrangement in the development of the family support

work service. However the respondents reported that families were ‘worked with’ or were ‘supported’ by family support work and interpreting what the respondents said did indicate parental participation in the case work undertaken by family support workers:

### **Family Support Work as Guiding a Family**

*‘The family support worker addresses a range of issues with families such as parenting, through being able to spend time and build relationships with them. The focus is on giving the family guidance to help them reach their goals’.*

(Respondent 5 Fieldwork notes)

### **Family Support Work Supporting a Family**

*‘Family support work supports families to care for each other and create or get back to having families working together to care for each other, work more efficiently and discover each other’*

(Respondent, 6 Fieldwork notes)

I concluded from these two quotations that the respondents thought there was an element of participation between the family support worker and the family in order to help the families identify their ‘goals’ and to help them work together to ‘discover each other’. However, I did not see evidence within the study of true partnership working where the recipient of the service was viewed as an equal partner by all of the stakeholders.

This study explored whether children, young people and their parents were viewed as ‘partners’ or ‘active participants’ in the work that was carried out by the family support worker (FSW). This was undertaken through two case studies; one involving a nine year old child referred for family support work due to her behaviour in the family home and; a fifteen year old boy referred for family support work due to disruptive behaviour in school, offending behaviour in the community and challenging behaviour in his home. The case studies differ from the vignettes (shown on page 116) in that the parents/young person have given me permission to use the studies and discuss in-depth the issue which they highlight. It is anticipated that

through these two case studies that the reader will see that at a local level the family support worker actively involves the child, young person and family in the assessment and care planning process.

### **Case Study Lucy Age 9**

This case study shows that the parents were viewed as active participants in the referral process, during the assessment process and in identification of supports for their child and family. The parent's have agreed to this case study and to the interview transcripts being used in this thesis as it illuminated many of the issues that services have in providing support.

Lucy was referred by the Health Visitor due to Lucy displaying challenging behaviour in the home and aggressive behaviour towards her younger sibling.

The Family Support Worker (FSW) met with the family to undertake a full assessment exploring all areas of the family's life. The family was happy to be involved in this process and engaged fully. The family specifically asked that the FSW explore the impact of Lucy's epilepsy on her education as mum and dad felt Lucy struggled in school.

In order to undertake the assessment the FSW made contact with: Lucy; her parents; extended family; class teacher; Health Visitor; G.P. and specialist health agency. The FSW undertook the assessment over an eight-week period meeting with the family regularly to up-date them on progress. From the meetings with the family and other agencies an assessment report was written outlining Lucy's needs and the FSW made recommendations for supporting Lucy. This was then discussed fully with Lucy and her parents who agreed with the recommendations made. The plan for supporting Lucy included;

- Referral to Educational Psychologist to support the school regarding Lucy's learning

- School to support learning needs and socialisation difficulties in school
- FSW to undertake parenting support work with the family
- Parents to set achievable targets for Lucy and reward positive behaviour
- Family to contact specialist agency regarding child's epilepsy – the FSW offered to do this but the family felt it was their responsibility
- Referral for a full medical by child paediatric service to ensure that Lucy's health and behavioural characteristics had no underlying causes i.e. autistic spectrum disorder, communication difficulties etc.
- Health Visitor to continue to support family on on-going basis for younger child.

### *Outcome*

All agencies involved in the plan for supporting Lucy undertook the work outlined in the plan with FSW having a co-coordinating role. The family also kept to their part of the plan and the case was closed to the family support worker four months after the initial referral as parents reported that behaviour in the home had improved and that Lucy was happy and settled in school.

### *Discussion*

The key issue with this referral was the child's behaviour at home. However, when the family support worker began the assessment phase they found that the family reported they were in 'crisis'. Mum was suffering from postnatal depression; Dad had lost his job due to ill health; Lucy was behaving badly at home and the parents reported they were on the verge of separation. The parents reported that the referrer, their health visitor, referred the family because the health visitor felt she did not have the 'expertise' to meet their needs. The health visitor discussed a referral to the Integration Team for family support work and outlined to the family what this would

involve. The family reported that whilst they agreed to the referral that there was very little information about what the Integration Team or family support worker would offer and this concerned them. They were unwilling to discuss their difficulties with the school, or other agencies, as they were afraid that their children would be taken away from them. The parents reported that they wanted someone to ‘come up with the answers and make things better’.

The family support worker allocated to the family indicated that that she did not have all the answers and that they would need to work together to explore the difficulties and possible solutions. The family reported that the FSW explored all of the areas of concern with them, discussed possible options and gave them ‘a new perspective on their difficulties’. The family reported that in their heart they knew the strategies that the FSW came up with were not new to them and they could have done some of them on their own without the FSW with but they were ‘too tired and worn out to put them into place’. However, the FSW took things at the families pace and in a relatively short time the parents were able to manage without support and the case was closed. Now, some two years later Lucy is well supported in school, has joined the Brownies, has new pals and her parents are settled and happy.

### *Key issues from the Case Study*

There was clear evidence in this case study that that the parents (and to some extent Lucy) had been involved as participants in the referral process by the Health Visitor and in the assessment process by the family support worker. The family support worker acted as;

- a conduit of communication for the family and services thereby giving the family clear information
- The FW role also acted as the ‘lead professional’ so that the family did not have to repeat their story over and over again to each agency.



There were positive outcomes for this family based on the robust assessment by the family support worker, information from the assessment was shared with each agency as appropriate and helped each agency to decide if the concerns were urgent or needed immediate attention. This led to Lucy being seen quickly by the community paediatrician and the educational psychologist rather than being placed on a routine waiting list.

Whilst this case related to mainly the participation of adults I then wanted to show the experience of Roger a 15 year old young person who was referred for family support due to challenging behaviour at home, exclusion from school and beginning to offend in the community. I compared Roger's experience to that of Lucy and her parents to see if Roger was an active participant in his assessment and care planning and found that whilst he was directly involved there were areas where his voice was ignored. Cohen et al (2004) argue that there has been a shift in the view of children and childhood as passive recipients of welfare to a view of the child as an active responsible citizen. However, whilst there is a contested view that parents should be viewed as 'partners' it is less clear about the role of children and young people.

### **Case Study Roger Age 15**

Roger was referred for family support work due to a number of exclusion from school. He had a history of challenging behaviour from the end of first year in school. He was given a range of supports in school from behaviour cards, support by guidance, support by depute head, base support and part time timetable. In third year Roger's behaviour deteriorated further and he began offending in the community, school refusing and when he was in school, presenting challenging behaviour. Mum also reported that she was having great difficulty with him at home. Roger was in danger of being permanently excluded from school. Roger was referred for family support work and alongside this, a referral was made to child and adolescent mental health and educational psychology for support to help identify his educational and emotional needs.

The FSW undertook an assessment of Roger's difficulties in the home, school and community. The FSW spoke to Roger, his mum and sister, paternal gran and maternal aunt. Although Roger and his mum gave permission to discuss the issues with dad he refused to take part in the assessment as 'he had moved on with his life'. The FSW also spoke with the school, the police, Roger's GP and his football club leader. From the assessment the FSW highlighted the amount of change that had taken place over a relatively short period of time. This included: Parental separation; father having a new partner and child and ignoring Roger and his sister; Roger moving from the community he had grown up in, to a community in a deprived area where Roger felt he had to 'prove' himself to his peers; Mother having to become the breadwinner and having less time for Roger and his sister; The family finding it difficult to talk to each other regarding the separation; Roger and his sister at times blamed their mother, and then they all blamed the father; Roger losing interest in school and hobbies he previously enjoyed.

The family support worker gathered all the information and from her analysis with the family came up with the following plan:

- Referral to young person's Counselling Project for Roger and his sister regarding their feeling of anger and rejection
- Referral for outreach teaching regarding his education due to 'revolving door' of exclusion
- Copy of the report sent to educational psychologist to ensure Roger's educational needs were being met
- Copy of report sent to Child and Adolescent Health Service due to Roger's low mood to support the previous referral
- Family Support Worker working with Roger 1-1 on an action plan to address his goals regarding work/college

- Family support worker working with family to address a 'family action plan' to help them get back to enjoying being a family rather than just trying to get through each day.

### *Outcome*

Roger did not return to mainstream school; he sat some of his standard grade exams at a specialist provision and has now gone on to a college placement. Roger refused to attend one of the specialist agencies listed above and the other did not meet with him after an initial visit. The family were unsure if this was because his needs were being met or that Roger had been 'forgotten' about. Roger stopped mixing with some of his peers in the community and his offending in the community stopped and mum reported that his behaviour in the home had improved dramatically. Here is what Roger thought of the process (Roger asked me to say it in his own words because he wanted to 'say it as it is').

#### **Did you know why you were referred to us for FSW?**

*Yes, Mrs A, ma teacher was great in explaining what was happening. Even when I was really bad she took me aside and explained what I had done wrong and the consequences of that. 'She wis great she could run that school single handed.'*

#### **Did you know what family support work was?**

*Didnae exactly know and it was kinda explained to me, but no' really. I knew it was help but didnae know the structure.*

#### **What support did you get from the FSW?**

*She came to visit us at home, spoke to me, ma mum and sister; she also came to visit me in school. She made me do things like draw things on a whiteboard to help me see my difficulties in pictures. She also wrote a report on me, but I can't remember what it said, but my mum was happy with it.*

**Did the support you get help?**

*Oh Yes, I felt I was being listened to and she (the FSW) put forward my views at meetings even when they were difficult.*

*I didnae like going to ..... (specialist service) it was a waste of time. Staff werenae approachable and asked lots of questions but werenae interested in the answers. I never went back. The FSW didnae gie me a row for that, she just said some things don't suit everyone but tried to persuade me to try again. I didnae go back.*

**If you were to describe the service you got to another young person what would you tell them?**

*In general its (FSW) great and it gives you confidence. The FSW makes you understand things and lets you understand what is happening to you. The FSW helps you come to terms with what is happening to you. You can tell them stuff that they will put across to other people and make sure something is done. They help you to see ahead and help you to set goals and a vision for yourself.*

**Were there any things you think might be done better?**

*Naw, no really.*

*Well maybe people (from other agencies) getting back to us about things. Having to travel for support. Promises made (by specialist services) but not kept. Schools excluding kids and taking away the hope of getting back in.*

**Anything else you want to add?**

*Any young person who is having troubles should be able to get a family support worker, she wis great in helping me see I was no' bad and that I have a future. I just couldnae cope with a big noisy school where staff didnae listen to me.*

**Key Issues From the Case Study**

There was evidence from the case study that Roger and his mother had participated in all aspects of the assessment and care planning. However Roger indicated that his needs and opinions were articulated through the family support worker who:

- Undertook a full assessment of the difficulties Roger and his family were facing

- Acted as an advocate on behalf of Roger and his mum at meetings
- Acted as the 'lead professional' ensuring all aspects of the care plan were followed through
- Delivered a therapeutic programme to Roger and his family regarding the separation issues

It is difficult to say which elements of support, if any, contributed to Roger's circumstances improving. However, Roger and his mother fully participated in the decisions made about his support and due to this I argue that the supports met the GIRFEC agenda and were timely, appropriate and met the needs of both Roger and his family (Scottish Executive 2005a). The case study of Roger really highlights the gap in participation between statutory systems and young people. Roger required the support of the family support worker to get his ideas and concerns across at meetings. He indicated that adults were not listening to him and he found it difficult to articulate his feelings of confusion about what was happening in his life. The case study also brings into sharp relief the issues about young people and school exclusion. Roger was particularly angry that he was not allowed to return to mainstream provision, yet knew that he had pushed the school to the limit. Parffrey (1994) argues that:

*'Naughty children are bad news in a market economy, no-one wants them. They are bad for the image of the school, they are bad for league (performance) tables, they are difficult and time consuming, they upset and stress the teachers'.*

Parffrey (1994, 108)

Roger had a good insight to his own difficulties; he indicated that he found school difficult, yet within that difficult environment he found supportive staff (i.e., Mrs A, who explained the consequences of his behaviour, which Roger appeared to accept). Roger and his mother also had a good relationship with the head teacher and even when he was excluded, Roger's mother wondered why the school had not permanently excluded him previously due to his behaviour. This role was very

difficult for Roger's mum, whilst she supported her son and recognised that he had pushed the school beyond their tolerance, she also had a dual role as a 'partner' in her son's education and was 'expected to support the school' due to her son's behaviour (Munn, 1993, 1).

### *Discussion*

This section has discussed two case studies which have highlighted some of the issues facing families and how the family support worker ensured that the child, young person and their families were involved throughout the assessment, analysis and planning of their support. The case studies show the diversity of work carried out by the family support worker:

- Assessment
- Care planning and review
- Advocacy role
- Key worker/Lead professional role
- Acting as 'boundroid' working across health, education, social work, youth justice, etc
- Delivery of parenting programme
- Ensuring participation of relevant people in each family's lives
- Promoting a resilience model of support to ensure that the families were empowered to utilise their own skills and expertise to address their difficulties

Whilst I have shown only two case studies here I argue that these cases are representative of the work undertaken by family support workers (I discussed in chapter four the difficulties I had in attempting to gain permission from other

families to take part). I think that they have shown that there was a good understanding of the principle of participation at a local individual case level. However, as discussed earlier, the respondents did not indicate participation in the development of integrated children's services or in the development of family support work within Pentesk Council. This lack of participation indicates that families' needs were not identified through services development. In the following section I draw on previous research to explore what parents and families indicate they want from services.

## **What Parents and Families Want from Services**

As I indicated at the start of this chapter I did not find evidence of overt partnership or participation of service users in the development of family support work. The respondents in this study reported that the family support worker worked 'with' or 'supported' children and families. In chapter four I discussed the difficulty I had engaging parents and young people in this study and this section now draws on previous research I undertook within Pentesk Council. This research was part of an MSc and explored the challenge of inclusion for New Community Schools Projects for children with SEBDs (Smith, 2002). Within this study parents and carers identified their difficulties in accessing supports and feeling that they were the 'cause' of the difficulty rather than being seen as the part of the support. I concluded that there was much more required by services before parents and carers would be viewed as being partners in welfare delivery.

### **Whose knowledge Counts?**

*'... my health visitor told me he was immature, so I tried not to worry. But deep down I knew he was 'slow'. He didn't do the things his brother and sister did'.*

(Fieldwork notes, Child 9)

### **Ensuring Good Communication**

*'There have been nights when I have cried with frustration. Who do I contact? Who can help us? I know 'E' needs help, but I don't know how to get it. I'm not clever or good with my words and sometimes feel like screaming please help'.*

(Fieldwork notes, Child 10)

### **Valuing Parents as Partners?**

*'I am in a job where I cannot get time off during the day and I can't afford not to work. I explained this to the person making the arrangements but the meeting was arranged for during the day. When I phoned to complain, they said it could not be changed and I should see my child's needs as priority. I was blazing, but I have loads of priorities, mainly keeping my family together'.*

(Fieldwork notes, child 6)

The study showed that at that time (2002) parents and carers did not think that they had been treated as partners or participants in their child's care and education. The parents/carers reported:

- Referral processes took too long
- Access to services was inconsistent
- A lack of communication between agencies and parents and carers
- Parents knowledge and understanding of the child's difficulties was not taken into account
- Value judgements were made on them
- A lack of co-ordination of services
- A lack of support from services.

Many of the findings of my own local research were borne out by writers such as Attwood, (1998); Lloyd, (2001); Semmens, (2001) and Wolfendale and Bastiani,



(2000). These writers argue that specialist supports should not only help the family but also ‘... the intervention must be connected with the rest of the clients life’ (Semmens, 2001, 76). It was really interesting to look back and see what has been achieved since my previous research. Pentesk Council is attempting to address many of the issues identified above through:

- The Refocusing of Welfare agenda
- The New Community Schools/ GIRFEC Agenda
- Through individual practice.

Within these competing agenda’s good practice can be evidenced through the case studies and the young person’s involvement in his assessment and plan and the parent’s involvement in Lucy’s plan. Within the education division, the Integrated Support Manager recently instigated a ‘participation’ conference where children, young people, parents/carers, education staff etc were all invited. This conference explored how the authority could better involve children, young people and parents carers in the decision making process. The education department has also recently appointed a ‘Participation Officer’ with a view to working with children and young people to obtain their views on services. Rose (in Moss and Petrie, 2005) writes that within the complex political world that workers have to find ‘spaces’ to develop opportunities for engagement, he writes ‘These minor engagements do not have the arrogance of programmatic politics ... They are cautious, modest, pragmatic, experimental, stuttering, tentative. They are concerned with the here and now, not with some fantasized future’. I argue that at this stage the authority is just beginning to engage fully with the participation agenda and in order to achieve ‘authentic participation’ (Anning et al, 2006, 121) where parents and children’s views are valued and help to shape policy and practice, then the whole area of participation will need to become embedded within all the authority structures, not just within education and social work services.

Until we have that involvement I outline below what the respondents in the two case studies and respondents from the research undertaken in 2002 report that they needed from children's service providers. Parents/carers and the young person reported that they wanted:

- Information –what services do staff provide?
- A quick response – the speed in which the referrals are actioned can prevent deterioration
- Good Communication – families want to be kept informed, even if it is not the news they want to hear, it is better than sitting worrying about something
- Staff who will listen and not make judgements
- Involvement in the decision making – families indicated they needed supports which met their family's needs
- Staff to act as an advocate on behalf of the families as they can sometimes be intimidated by large groups of professionals
- Staff who are knowledgeable – someone who knows the area, the supports that are available and someone who will find out things they are less knowledgeable about

This information on what parents want from services is not new, nor is it unreasonable and should be met through the new policies and practices connected with GIRFEC policy. Parents are not asking to be 'partners' in their child's support. However they do want to participate in the decision making process and it is through this that they will begin to influence policy and practice at a local level. The revisit to my previous research did show me that at a local level some aspects of service provision had moved on a pace i.e., the refocusing agenda; locality forums; better integrated working but it was also slightly depressing that the two case studies

highlighted much of the same issues i.e. lack of co-ordination; lack of communication etc and I do wonder if in another six years I will be highlighting the same issues within another report.

### **Conclusion to Section Four (chapter five)**

This section of the chapter has discussed participation and partnership through the introduction of two case studies; Lucy age 9 and Roger age 15. It highlighted many of the issues around partnership and participation. I argue that at this stage I felt that participation is just becoming embedded within some of the services within the local authority but until the authority has an overall participation strategy then agencies and individuals will continue to find 'spaces within their individual workloads to develop local initiatives. The only problem with this approach is that this work may not be valued by service managers and is open to personal interpretation.

I have shown at a local level that the family support workers embed participation in local practice with their work with the family and young person in the case studies. I suggested that the successful outcomes in these cases were due to the participation of the service users in the assessment and planning of supports. However, it was clear that there were differences between the cases; the parents of Lucy found that they were able to articulate their needs. Roger found that his needs were articulated through the family support worker. I called upon previous research undertaken in 2002, which highlighted that parents did not feel their contribution was valued by agencies. I argue that whilst I believe that the New Community Schools and GIRFEC agenda has moved forward some of these issues for parents, children and young people, that it will be sometime before the local authority has participation embedded within its overall strategy.

## CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER FIVE

This chapter has explored ‘second order’ principles (Knight,2002; Munn, 2006) and concluded that the development of family support work is based on a very complex mix of political and policy change coupled with local interpretation. The difficulty with this heady mix is that there is no strategic agreed view of what family support is or does. This has left family support work in a vulnerable position within the authority, open to sudden changes of direction without an understanding of the impact of this on service users and staff delivering the service. The chapter explored the development of family support work through four key areas:

- Section one discussed the tensions between the terms ‘early intervention’ and ‘higher tariff’ work and the impact of this on the expectation of the family support work role. This section discussed that social work’s withdrawal from service provision pushed the expectation from family support work from early intervention to working with higher level needs. I also argued that the lack of shared understanding of terminology such as ‘early intervention’ and ‘child protection’ impacted on the expectations of the family support work role and concluded that there is a shift towards high tariff work. This has effectively undermined the focus of family support work which was originally envisaged to be a preventative strategy.
- Section two discussed family support work as a refocusing of welfare services. This section discussed the positive aspects of the refocusing agenda: the development of the Children’s Services Planning Group; the development of locality forums; the development of a staged support system etc. However, the section also highlighted that some of these processes were not widely understood by stakeholders due to the lack of dissemination of information. This section also discussed that social work, one of the key stakeholders, withdrew from service provision and the impact that this has had on the development of the family support work role and concluded that there is a re-positioning of original stakeholders.

Whilst there had been improvements of outcomes within the changing structure, there are problems with core agencies commitment to the process and this is very delicately balanced at the moment.

- Section three discussed the skills and qualifications of family support work and the original role of the family support workers to act as ‘boundary spanners’ staff that had the ability to work within own professions and cross the boundary of others. Clearly this demanded a high level of skill and expertise; however, this was not the view of some of the respondents who viewed the family support work role as being ‘para-professional’. I suggest that this mismatch in understanding has been influenced by policy, practice and the respondents’ position to the decision making process.
- Section four discussed the participation of children and families in developing service delivery and I explored the issue of partnership/participation of children, young people and their families. I concluded that partnership working was just becoming embedded in some of the departments within the local authority and until there is a clear shared strategy then staff will have to find ‘spaces’ within their practice to deliver this. I highlighted that at local level the family support workers in the two case studies had involved their families in all aspects of their assessment and care planning and concluded that at a local, case level, the family and young person participated in their care planning, but their experiences were different. However, there was little evidence that families participated in the development of services.

I argue that these four key areas have impacted on the development of the family support work role and that until the authority has a clear, agreed strategy then family support work will always lack direction and be open to sudden change depending on the next crisis within the authority. Family support work also lacks a clear ‘profile’ so it is viewed as a warm and cosy low cost, low skill initiative rather than the purpose it was envisaged for, to act as an agent of change and be able work across

professional boundaries. Within the modernising agenda there is a gathering view that there is a need for a new profession to meet the needs of modern welfare delivery and the next chapter discusses if family support work could be that new or emerging profession.

# **Chapter 6**

## **Discussion**

### **Introduction**

Chapter one indicated that the main aim of this study was to explore the role of family support work within Pentesk Council. The study aspired to contribute to discussions that aimed to clarify the role of family support work within Pentesk Council. It was anticipated that increased clarity concerning the role would improve the retention of family support workers and ultimately lead to a better service for children and their families. In chapter two I highlighted six key areas I wanted to explore within this study:

- What philosophical/theoretical approaches underpinned the development of family support work?
- Was there an understanding of the changing role of the family?
- Was there an agreed definition of the role of family support?
- What was being delivered under the heading of family support work?
- Was there an agreed definition of 'who' provides family support work
- Is Family support work a new or emerging profession within welfare delivery?

This chapter has three sections where I revisit these key areas to explore if my data has helped to answer any of these questions. The key areas are:

- Section One: This section reviewed national and local policy and concluded that family support work emerged from a complex interplay of legislative, policy and practice change coupled with local interpretation.

- Section Two: This section discusses opportunities to influence family support work through the GIRFEC agenda and suggests that the authority needs to adopt a clear theoretical position in relation to children's services delivery in order to reduce levels of tension.
- Section Three: This section discusses the possibility of family support work becoming a new or emerging profession through the Scottish Government 'Standard for Childhood Practice' (2007b) or through the adoption of a social pedagogy model of education and training (Children in Scotland, 2008). The section concludes that whilst there may be difficulties in adopting these approaches that it may give family support work the protection it lacks at present.

I concluded from the exploration of these areas that my study provided me with opportunities to revisit the role and purpose of family support work within Pentesk Council. I discuss the longer term view that family support work could be part of a new or emerging profession through the Standard for Childhood Practice and a social pedagogy model of education and training. However, despite these opportunities to further develop the role of family support work, I also discuss the 'threats' to family support work through the new 'Single Status' agreement and the financial difficulties facing the authority.

### **Section One: A Review of National and Local Key Policy Shifts**

In order to go forward it is helpful to review where I believe the authority is at present in relation to the development of family support work. Chapter two demonstrated complex 'shifts' in welfare delivery over the last twenty years and how this has contributed to the emergence of family support work. This included;

- Key shifts in political ideology from the 'moral underclass' and the market led discourses of the Conservative Government to New Labour's 'third way' 'social integrationist' approaches and their affirmation of the



market led approaches of the previous administration (Coles, 2000; Giddens, 2004; Levitas, 2005).

- The Social Inclusion agenda of New Labour that placed emphasis on helping the family help themselves through encouraging full employment and implemented policies such as: the working family tax credit; childcare tax credit; parental leave directive etc (Gillies, 2005; Glass, 1999).
- A shift in the reactive approaches of the 1970s to the proactive approaches of welfare delivery of the 1980s and 90s that led to the emergence of family support work. For example, The 1989 Children Act in England and Wales and the Children Scotland Act (1995) indicated that a new approach was required to meet the needs of children and young people. It was from this period that the term 'child in need' emerged which encompassed a wider view of welfare for children beyond child protection and single service delivery (Little, 1999; Tisdall, 1997).
- A shift brought about by the seminal report 'For Scotland's Children' (Scottish Executive, 2001a) which required local authorities to 'change' the way they delivered services in Scotland and offered time-limited funding through the Children's Change Fund (Scottish Executive, 2002).

Chapter two also highlighted conflicting views on the role of the family. Demonstrating how the role of the family came under scrutiny by a government that viewed it as a 'safe haven' (Pinkerton, 2000) for children and young people that should help create 'good citizens' who support the material needs of their families (Pithouse et al, 1998). It indicated that the government were accused of having a rather rose-tinted view of families and of ignoring that a 'family' can also place children and young people 'at risk' from neglect, abuse, violence, etc (Utting, 1995; Wasoff and Hill, 2002).

It is from this very complex mix of legislative, governmental and policy change that family support emerged but it is very unclear from the literature what family support

work is, what it does and who provides it (Dolan et al, 2006; McGhee and Waterhouse; 2002, Penn and Cough, 2002). Within Pentesk Council this heady mix of policy, legislation and governmental change has impacted on the development of family support work and this study attempted to clarify one small area (What is family support work within one authority in Scotland?). This small scale study found that the lack of clarity identified in chapter two at a national and international level is echoed within Pentesk Council. Although most respondents in the study were aware of activities provided through family support work, there was a lack of clarity of *what* family support work is or does and *what* the skills and qualifications were of the staff that delivered it.

## **Local Policy Issues**

Given the complexity of the legislation and policy relating to the development of family support (described above) it is helpful to summarise where Pentesk Council is at in this stage of welfare delivery. As discussed in chapter five, the authority has used its funding to refocus its services and change the way child welfare is delivered. This section discusses these changes and how they have been sustained through turbulent times. However, the lack of clarity in the purpose of family support work has led to the family support work role being pushed further along the welfare continuum without a clear understanding of the impact this has on the staff that undertake this role. This section summarises these tensions with a view to opening dialogue with the authority to contribute to the discussions regarding the role of family support work within the refocusing agenda.

As discussed in chapter five, following on from the For Scotland's Children Report (Scottish Executive, 2001a) Pentesk Council applied for funding from the Children's Change Fund (Scottish Executive, 2002) and has used this funding to:

- Consolidate the membership of the Children's Services Planning Group which has the strategic overview of Children's Services delivery
- Develop integrated children's services teams

- Implement a multi-agency staged support system
- Develop integrated children services forums
- Develop a 'new' provision: Family Support Work

These developments offered the opportunity to provide services where the focus was on overcoming barriers to support and providing parents and children with a single point of entry to welfare services. Achieving this level of partnership working should not be underestimated and this has required a high level of skill and commitment in planning and negotiating these changes at both strategic and operational level (Anning et al, 2006; Peri 6 et al, 2002). Again, as discussed in chapter five, although there are difficulties, such as different professional values, information sharing, power roles etc, these developments have led to:

- Improved communication between agencies
- Shared understanding of the difficulty each agency has in relation to children's welfare
- Shared responsibility for the care and welfare of children, young people and their families
- Improved service provision for children and families

In the latter part of this chapter I suggest that there are opportunities to build on these successes and clarify the role of family support work within these systems to ensure a robust and sustained approach to child welfare services. The following section summarises the key findings from the study.

### **Key Findings from the Study**

The respondents in this study indicated that family support work took place within a range of contexts from providing support at the 'developmental' level (i.e. available

to all children and families) through to the 'compensatory' level (i.e. targeted work) and working with children and families at a 'protective' level (i.e. working one-to-one to prevent social exclusion or child protection issues) The respondents alluded to a whole range of provision including:

- One-to-one work with individuals
- One-to-one work with families
- Groupwork in schools
- Advocacy work
- Assessment, care planning and review
- Report writing for Children's Hearings, Child Protection Reports etc
- Parenting work in the home and with Groups
- Multi-agency working with the Children's Services Forums
- Capacity Building
- Joint working with schools, social work, health visitors etc

However, despite this range of activities carried out by family support workers there was no clarity about the purpose of family support work within the study. Respondents were unsure if it was a new 'non deficit' approach to delivering welfare services or if it was just 'filling a gap' in welfare services. I concluded from the policy papers (discussed in chapter five) that the perceived role of family support work within the bid to the Scottish Executive was to help the authority achieve the changes it aspired to by acting as a 'boundary spanner' and having the skills, expertise and confidence to work beyond their own professional boundary (Peri 6 et al, 2002). However this role was not acknowledged by all the respondents within the study and some respondents appeared to be view family support as a low skill, low cost alternative to providing child welfare (Penn and Gough, 2002; Pinkerton, 2006).

I concluded that whilst the initial aspiration of Pentesk Council was to use family support work to refocus the way it delivered children's services, this vision was diminished. One could speculate that the following issues contributed to this:

- Lack of Theoretical/ Philosophical Approach (Chapter Four)

A lack of a clear philosophical approach within Pentesk Council has led to instability concerning the family support work role. The key aim of 'early intervention' has been lost and family support work is being pushed further along the welfare continuum without discussion or recourse to the Children's Services Planning Group, Children's Services Forums etc.

- Impact of Poor Child Protection Report (Chapter Four)

The impact of the poor child protection report has left social work unable to fulfill its statutory duties due to changes in management, the lack of operational staff, lack of funding, demand on services etc. The result of this is that family support work is being pushed to fill this gap without a clear remit or clarity of expectation.

- Power Relationships (Chapter Five)

Power relationships within the Children's Services Planning Group meant that some 'partners' were more powerful than others. Some partners had the power to set the agenda, whilst others found themselves relegated to being 'junior partners' (Hatcher and Le Blond, 2001; Weinstein in Leathard, 2007). This led to key stakeholders being powerful in the decision-making process whilst others, who may be dependent on funding, were in a less powerful position.

- Communication with Stakeholders (Chapter Five)

A lack of dissemination of the bid to key stakeholders within children's services delivery has led to a lack of clarity of the role of family support work. It is possible to attribute this to the 'initiativitis' of New Labour where a raft of new policy initiatives left the authority with little time to develop a shared understanding of how this policy impacted on each

service (Beattie, 2007; Peri, 6 et al, 2002). Each agency has developed its own idea of what family support work is and should provide and this has led to tensions within child welfare delivery.

- Tensions between Early Intervention and High Tariff Work (Chapter Five). A view emerged that suggested ‘early intervention’ is a less valuable role in child welfare services. It was found that this view lead to a ‘two tier’ system of support in Pentesk Council where the family support role was viewed as being subordinate to the social work role or was viewed as unable to provide an adequate response to child protection (Platt, 2001; Pinkerton, 2006). Child protection work was seen as being the main goal of social work services and this view appeared to contradict national policies that suggested preventative child and family services should be the underpinning policy of any local authority.

It is possible to conclude that the combination of these issues has contributed to a lack of clarity of the role of family support work within the authority and it these areas that the authority need to re-examine if they want to improve the services they offer to children and families. There appear to be opportunities to improve services through the GIRFEC agenda (Scottish Executive, 2005a). The New SNP Government has adopted the GIRFEC policy of the previous administration and there is an expectation that local authorities will deliver integrated services involving a ‘one child, one plan’ for children receiving welfare services. This is discussed in more detail in section two.

## **Conclusion to Section One (chapter six)**

This section demonstrates that a number of governmental, ideological and policy ‘shifts’ have contributed to the development of family support work. I discussed how national policy was interpreted at a local level and how this led to the development of integrated children’s services within Pentesk Council. Family support work emerged within the context of integrated services and this led respondents to allude to a range of activities carried out under the heading of family support work i.e. assessment,

advocacy work, parenting programmes etc. However, respondents were unsure if family support work was a 'service', an 'approach', or an attempt to fill a gap in services. The data from the respondents reflects the tensions within the authority regarding the lack of clarity around the family support work role. This has left family support work in a vulnerable position, open to changes in direction without a clear philosophical reason for doing so. In the following sections I look at how this might be addressed through the GIRFEC (Scottish Executive, 2005a) agenda currently operating within the authority and the possibility of 'professionalising' family support work through the Standard for Childhood Practice (Scottish Government, 2007b) or the adoption of a social pedagogy model of education and training (Cameron, 2006; Children in Scotland, 2008).

## **Section Two: The Opportunity to Clarify the FSW Role through GIRFEC Agenda**

I believe that within Pentesk Council there is an opportunity to revisit the role of family support work through the new GIRFEC agenda (Scottish Executive, 2005a, 3). The GIRFEC agenda is a '... set of priorities to improve strategic planning, the integration and quality delivery of services for all children and young people in Scotland'. As discussed in chapter four, the new SNP administration took the decision not to underpin the GIRFEC agenda within a legal framework as local authorities in Scotland had developed services that meet local need and there was no 'one size fits all approach'.

In chapter five, I was highly critical of the lack of dissemination regarding the development of integrated services across Pentesk Council. However, the GIRFEC agenda has engaged a whole range of staff within the authority. A planning manager was appointed with a clear remit to take this forward. Alongside this, there is also a strategic planning group and an operational planning group that involve a more even spread of staff including nine health reps; nine staff from the local authority and three staff from the voluntary sector. Communication from each group is disseminated widely via updates, reports and e-mails to all of the children's services

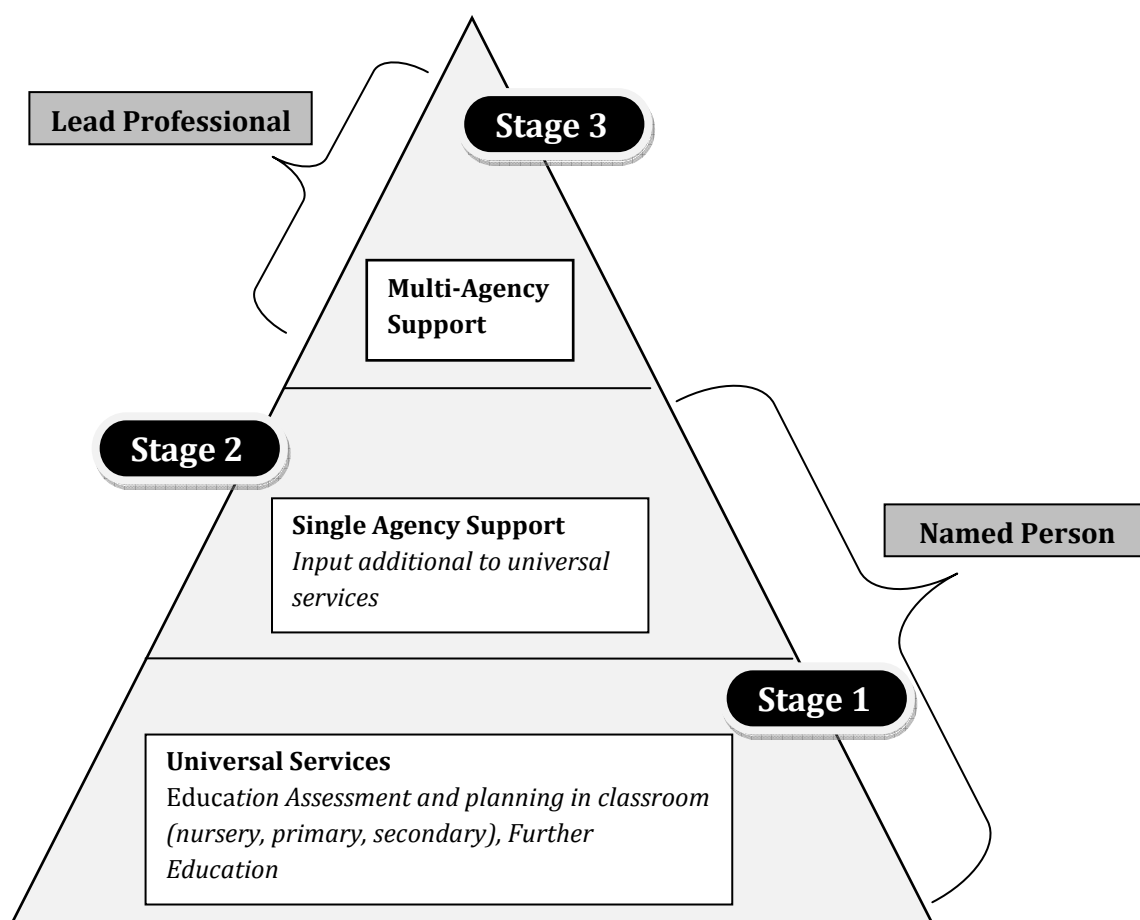
agencies including schools, health visitors, school nurses, police, social work, voluntary agencies etc. This has helped make the process of implementing the GIRFEC policy more acceptable to agencies. Staff, though still wary, appear less fearful of the terms 'lead professional, or 'named person' role and the implications the GIRFEC agenda has for their service. Pentesk Council report that 'Everyone is clear about their role and how they will contribute to the collective responsibility for each child'(Pentesk Council, 2008b, 2). Although this work has taken over eighteen months, it appears to have been time well spent. Peri 6 et al (2002, 113) advised that taking time to embed policy is a crucial stage in developing services and can build 'bridgeheads' for later integration. Through the involvement of agencies in creating the structures it has become easier for agencies to 'buy into' the changes within Pentesk Council.

At present the authority is attempting to 'map' existing services onto the 'staged system of support' (discussed in chapter 6). Within this mapping exercise each agency is reviewing their service and where they will sit in a new agreed model of support. I believe that this provides an opportunity to clarify the role of family support work and where it might sit within this staged support model. Two integration managers are representatives on both groups so it provides an ideal opportunity to open discussions regarding the family support work role. The staged support system within Pentesk Council mirrors the model described by Gilligan (2000) and used by me (in chapter two) to highlight the different approaches of family support work (i.e. Developmental family support work; Compensatory family support work; Protective family support). The model adopted by the authority describes the three levels as being:

- Universal – services available for all children and families
- Targeted – services targeted at individuals and families requiring single service support
- Specialist – services for children and families requiring very specialised support



## PENTESK MULTI-AGENCY APPROACH TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE



Pentesk Council (2008b, 3)

Whilst this appears a positive way forward within the authority it is interesting to observe the positioning of agencies within this GIRFEC agenda. The whole underpinning message from the GIRFEC agenda is that each and every child should be at the centre of planning and their needs should override the needs of individual agencies. However, the GIRFEC initiative does not take place in vacuum and other policies and reports from the government have impacted on agencies' ability to deliver services (i.e. The Caleb Ness Report in Scotland; Victoria Climbié report in England; 21st Century Social Work Review; Hall 4, Review etc). The Hall 4 review indicated that there was little evidence that providing a universal service had improved health outcomes for poorer children and those resources would be better

used by providing a more targeted service. As a result of this review the Health Visiting and School Nursing Service in Scotland will have a limited role in delivering ‘universal’ services as a result of the implementation of this new policy. The outcome of all of the reports and policies listed above is that there are more demands on services, which I suggest are leading to a rationing, or limiting, of the breadth and depth of services each agency offers.

Within Pentesk Council, social work has positioned itself at level three – specialist support. This is broadly in line with the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Report that outlines four levels of social work involvement:

- Levels one and two social work offer ‘advice’
- At level three they ‘... engage with people in early intervention at a high risk of vulnerability
- At level four they ‘... work directly with people ... where there are complex unpredictable longer term needs and risks’ (Scottish Executive, 2006a, 36)

Similarly, the Health Visiting and School Nursing Services have positioned themselves at stage two ‘targeted’ level of support due to the outcome of Hall 4, Review (Scottish Executive, 2005b). What is interesting about this positioning is that it has occurred in spite of both policy reports (Hall 4 and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Social Work) actually highlighting the role that social work and health visiting can play in preventative services. In the Pentesk context, it appears that that Social Work and Health Visiting are removing themselves from the preventative end of the welfare spectrum. It is possible to conclude that agencies within this staged approach are positioning themselves for pragmatic reasons i.e. high staff turnover, lack of staff, lack of resources etc rather than through a clear philosophical analysis of their services or how these shifts might benefit children and families. For example, chapter five highlighted how social work narrowed their service delivery due to issues such as lack of funding and a poor child protection report. This shift also

echoes much of the discussion and debate outlined in chapter two that concluded that the identification of 'children in need' led to a similar rationing mechanism (Jeffrey, 2003; McGhee and Waterhouse, 2002; Tisdall, 1997).

Despite this shift, I believe that within this re-alignment of services there is 'space' to explore where family support work could fit. There has been discussion within the planning groups of Pentesk that family support work could '... be a universal service or operate at the top of level one and all of level two supporting children and families to access level three services' (Pentesk Council, 2008b). Whilst this statement acknowledges that family support work has a place within the new GIRFEC agenda, I think it ignores that fact that the purpose of family support work within the authority has still not been clarified. I believe that before the authority decides the 'stage' at which family support work should operate; we should first revisit the purpose of family support work to establish the theoretical and philosophical positions that will underpin this work. I have indicated in this study that a lack of a theoretical position has undermined the development of family support work and led to family support work operating in a vulnerable situation. I suggest that despite the constraints of policy, and practice that there is now an opportunity to incorporate a clear theoretical/philosophical position into debates concerning the nature of family support work.

### **Theoretical Position**

I indicated in chapter two that I was struck by the lack of reference to theory in the literature on family support work. Only Dolan, Canavan and Pinkerton (2006, 15) discussed theoretical perspectives and attempted to locate family support work within 'social support' theory. Other writers such as Brown, (2003), Jeffrey, (2003) and Saltiel et al, (2003) alluded to theory but it was implicit in their writing rather than explicit. Only one respondent within the study mentioned theory (page 127) but indicated that it was not required:

*'Family support work is not theoretical, it is about providing practical short-term support, it's what it says on the tin ...'*

(Respondent 10, Fieldnotes)

Similarly within the GIRFEC agenda in Pentesk Council I only found one reference to theory and it related to risk assessment. This was in the form of e-mail to the practice group;

*'Models of risk assessment are considered, one particular approach is advocated the 'developmental-ecological approach which requires that both risk and protective factors are examined and is grounded in theories and knowledge of children's development'.*

Pentesk Council (2007a)

I suggest that this is an area that should be addressed within Pentesk Council. As a practioner, I believe that theory helps us to understand processes taking place in the wider world, i.e. power, mediation, class struggle etc (Giroux, 2001; Ozga, 2000). As discussed in chapter 3 (methods chapter) my interest lies in critical theory where I believe that my role is to challenge the taken for granted view of policy and practice and to:

- Draw attention to and challenge the taken for granted or dominant assumptions informing policy
- Expose the effects of policy on the ground
- Contribute to democracy through development of independent assessments of policy

Ozga, (2000, 47)

These three areas appear most pertinent to this study and to me (as a practioner and manager of a service) because we have a relatively 'new' provision operating within the authority. This research has shown that the lack of clarity and purpose for the family support work role has impacted on the staff delivering it and the children and

families receiving it. This study found that there was uncertainty as to whether family support work is a new dynamic way of delivering welfare services that empowers the families and treats them as partners, or whether it is an approach that involves simply 're-arranging deckchairs' with no clear philosophy other than the pragmatic need to fill gaps in welfare services? For example, chapter five suggested that there was no active critical analysis of the effects of the Pentesk bid and subsequent national policy change on both the family worker role and outcomes for families and children. It also found that good outcomes related more to pragmatism rather than judgements made on a clear theory of practice.

I believe that having a clear theoretical position helps both staff and managers to underpin their practice. Indeed, whilst there was no overt link to theory in the local authority's paperwork I do believe that the authority had aspired (without realising it) to delivering a 'social model' of support (Herbert et al, 2002, Swain et al, 2004). The authority 'aspired' to deliver 'an integrated approach to children's services' and provide a service where 'families did not have to keep repeating their stories' (Pentesk Council, 2002a). The development of the staged support system and the integrated children's services offered opportunities to refocus Pentesk services. These developments aimed to remove barriers to support and provide children and families with a single point of entry.

However, I suggest that despite the aspiration to develop a social model approach, some of the practice of supporting families was based on an individual, 'blaming', culture and the moral underclass discourse (discussed in chapter two). That is, it is concerned with individualising and problematising individual children and families. Indeed, it may be the case that Pentesk Council succumbed to '...the Thatcher assertion that there is no such thing as a society' (Walton, 2005, 591). There was no clear evidence in the study that the development of family support work actually made real differences to children and families. Respondents were unable to clarify the benefits of family support work. A few respondents reported that in their view family support work was a 'good thing' but they also indicated that they lacked clear evidence to support their view. Moss (2006, 194) writes that the '... jury is still out

on the latest round of U.K interventions ...’ and whilst there can be positives and benefits for the children and families receiving the services he is concerned that ‘... the uncertainty lies in the ability of public provisions to counter strong structural forces – economic, social, cultural and political – that produce material inequalities and social dislocation’.

I believe that having a shared philosophical position within the authority for all of our services would give family support work stability and contribute to the refocusing agenda. I also believe that it would be possible to develop a shared philosophy based on the principle that it is the role of family support work to enable families to self-empower and work in partnership with agencies to resolve their life issues. Dolan et al (2006) promote a ‘social support’ theory of family support work and it appears that this model would sit well within Pentesk Council. The following section discusses this in more detail.

### **Theoretical Proposition for Pentesk Council**

Family support work within Pentesk Council has developed ‘organically’ since it was introduced four years ago. This study has shown that when the proposal for family support work was developed that the authority had an idea that it wanted something ‘different’ in the area of welfare delivery. Chapter five suggested that this vision had been eroded due to a number of practical issues such as the poor child protection report, the tensions between early intervention and high tariff work, etc. I suggest the authority now needs to consolidate what has been developed and underpin it with an ‘overt’ theoretical perspective. I argue that this might contribute to giving family support work stability and credibility within the authority and prevent it being open to sudden changes in direction.

I was interested in the model suggested by Dolan, Pinkerton and Canavan (2006) where they offer ‘social support theory’ to underpin family support work. They suggest that family support work should have the following values:

- Working in partnership with children, families, professionals and communities
- Needs led, striving for minimum intervention
- Clear focus on wishes, feelings, safety and well-being of children
- Reflects a strengths-based/resilience perspective
- Strengthens informal networks
- Accessible and flexible incorporating both child protection and out-of-home- care
- Facilitates self referral and multi-access referral paths
- Involves service users and frontline providers in the planning, delivery and evaluation
- Promotes social inclusion, addressing issues of ethnicity, disability and rural urban communities
- Outcome-based evaluation supports quality services based on best practice.

Dolan, Pinkerton and Canavan (2006, 13)

This model would offer a sound theoretical basis to cover the range of activities carried out under the heading of family support work. Indeed, the two case studies (discussed in chapter five) demonstrate that family support workers have these values in mind when working with the families in Pentesk Council. I suggest that the authority should consider integrating this model into the GIRFEC agenda (discussed above) to give it a clear theoretical and philosophical base.

However, despite my admiration for Dolan et al's (2006) writing some of the values are a bit like 'motherhood and apple pie', no-one could fundamentally disagree with

them. The problem is that this study has shown that vested interests, defensive practice and unequal power relations within the structures of children's services prevent family support workers from gaining recognition for such a philosophy from other service providers. Very often this lack of recognition was intertwined by debates concerning who should carry out family support work, undertake an assessment, provide services etc. This lack of recognition was also underpinned by debates about professional status where family support work was seen as subordinate to other agencies delivering welfare services. I suggest that having an agreed theoretical basis for family support work would go some way to enable family support workers to gain recognition and credibility.

The findings from chapter five also suggest that the shift to a model relating to Dolan et al (2006) would also be inhibited by the fact that there is a lack of parental involvement in the decision making process in Pentesk children and family services and that professionals do not view parents as partners in welfare delivery. Writers such as Davis and Edwards (2003); Hegarty (1993) and Wolfendale and Bastiani (2000) have been critical of the 'partnership with parents agenda' because participation processes were often scuppered by a failure to address power imbalances between service users and providers. Similarly, Hill and Tisdall (1997, 71) were very critical of what they describe as 'parent lead' theories which do not take into account the views and rights of children and young people. I suggest that the values highlighted by Dolan et al may be very difficult to put into practice due to resistance from agencies delivering welfare services.

Throughout this study I have drawn on the work of Dolan, Canavan and Pinkerton and have a great deal of respect for their writing because it helped me see that my concern at a local level was very much reflected at national and international level. This helped to show me that working in the area of welfare delivery is a complex process which flits constantly between positives and negatives and that there is more than one view of family support work. However, I am under no illusion that their work will provide an easy answer to many of the issues regarding family support work. Their work contributes to ongoing debates about the credibility of children's



services and it is my feeling that their model sometimes overlooks the political context of family work (e.g. situations where some services are perceived to be ‘less than’ or have less status than others).

Social work has a long history of provision in the U.K. yet it is only now that it has a recognised place as a ‘profession’ in children’s service delivery through the establishment of a degree level training and a new regulatory body (Stevenson, 2005; Walton, 2005). Similarly, staff involved in early year’s provision has found it difficult to assert their position within a professional framework. They have found their role being undervalued by perspectives that suggest that care providers for the under fives are ‘less than’ those delivering ‘educational’ activities such as early years teachers (Cameron, 2006). I suggest that despite the difficulties outlined above, that the theory suggested by Dolan et al (social support theory) would go some way to helping family support work gain ‘professional’ recognition for their role in welfare delivery because it encompasses a holistic approach and recognises the complexity of the family support work role.

However, there were mixed views from the respondents regarding family support work as a profession within Pentesk Council. Traditionally ‘professions’ and ‘professionals’ have been defined by having a shared philosophy, core values and knowledge that has ‘... not been appropriated by others’ and this has given them a position of power (Friedson 1994, 40). Although this view has been challenged by a number of writers, (Erault, 1994; MacDonald, 1995; Schon, 1987) it is evident that having a shared philosophy, theoretical position and core values offers some form of protection to those offering welfare services. The role of family support work as a ‘new or emerging profession’ is explored further in the following section.

## **Conclusion to Section Two (chapter six)**

This section has discussed the key findings from the study in relation to the constraints of policy development. It has suggested that the data from the study has the implications for the future development of the family support worker role. It has

identified an opportunity within Pentesk Council to clarify the family support worker role through the GIRFEC agenda. However, it has also suggested that Pentesk Council needs to underpin family support work with a clear theoretical perspective if that opportunity is to be grasped. This section (in keeping with Ozga, 2000) has also included an independent assessment of the impact of policy on the family worker role and indicated that practical issues have prevented the development of a clear philosophy and theory of family work.

In an effort to bridge this gap this section considered a 'social support' theoretical approach to family work suggested by Dolan Pinkerton and Canavan (2006) that promotes a positive view of the family, aims to build resilience and uses a 'rights' based approach. It suggested that this approach would work well within Pentesk Council because it chimes with the values of those involved in family support work. It also suggested that such a philosophy could form the basis for future development of the family support worker role. The following section takes this suggestion forward and explores the potential for family support work to become a 'new or emerging' profession.

### **Section Three: Family Support work as a New or Emerging Profession?**

This study has shown that family support work within Pentesk Council lacked clarity of purpose and role. It has argued that the initial aim that family support work should enable workers to act as 'change agents' and assist in modernising agendas has been eroded. It has linked this erosion to barriers created by a convergence of policy and practice implications. It has also suggested that there are 'spaces' and opportunities to redefine the family support work role through the GIRFEC agenda and the adoption of social support theory suggested by Dolan et al (2006). This section takes this idea forward and considers whether family support work could be a 'new' or 'emerging' profession within contemporary welfare delivery. It suggests that there are two possible routes where family support work might contribute to the debate on new professions in Scotland: The new 'Standard for Childhood Practice' (Scottish Government 2007b) and the adoption of a social pedagogy model of education and

training for staff involved in delivering children's services (Cameron, 2006; Children in Scotland, 2008). Each option provides a 'space' to open discussions regarding this relatively new provision (family support work) and where this might fit within these two routes.

Some respondents in this study discussed where they thought family support work sat within the professions debate. They indicated that they thought that family support work could become a profession:

### **Family Support work as a Profession**

*'I would say that family support work is a profession, previously I would not have said this but the contribution they have made to the authority over the last few years has been considerable'.*

(Respondent 10, Fieldnotes)

### **Professionalising Family Support Work**

*'Family support work on its own in this authority is at present too small to meet the needs of children and families. But if we are looking at professionalising FSW across Scotland then that would give it strength'.*

(Respondent 4, Fieldnotes)

Whilst these respondents promote a fairly positive role for the family support worker other respondents were less sure of the role and function of family support work:

### **Family support work conveying a non professional Role**

*'The title 'family support worker' conveys a non-professional role, within my service support worker is an administrative post'.*

(Respondent 8, Fieldnotes)

### **Family Support Work in a Support Role**

*'Family Support Worker to me indicates that the worker is working to the remit of another professional, they are there in a support role not in a leading practitioner role'.*

(Research Methods Research notes, 2006)

These two opposing sets of views demonstrate the lack of clarity concerning the family support worker role within Pentesk Council. Similarly, chapter five indicated (rather ironically) that at the same time as family support workers were being pushed to fill the lead practitioner tasks left by other services, there was also an opposing view that family support work was a low-cost, low-skill, 'support to the practitioner' activity. It concluded that some respondents had not engaged with the main aim of the original family worker bid to the Scottish Executive which was to enable family support work to act as a 'change' agent within the authority.

The last section of this chapter argued that the GIRFEC agenda and social support theory offered potential for family support work to become embedded in practice within Pentesk Council. The following sections discuss the different ways that family support work could evolve into a new or emerging profession through the new Standard for Childhood Practice (Scottish Government, 2007b) and/or the adoption of a social pedagogy approach to education and training in Scotland (Cameron, 2006; Children in Scotland 2008).

### **The Standard for Childhood Practice**

The Standard for Childhood Practice (Scottish Government, 2007b) offers workers in the childcare sector the opportunity to access education and training to equip them for 21st century welfare delivery. In the past education and childcare have been viewed as separate entities and those involved in the delivery of the 'care' element have been viewed as a low skill, low cost providers (Cameron, 2006). This perception has covered a range of early years and childcare workers; youth workers; out of school staff etc. Their role as the main individuals who work with children was undervalued because society itself did not perceive children and work with children as valuable. However such perspectives have been challenged and there is a new qualification on offer to those in the childcare sector (Christie and Menmuir, 2005; Hughes and Davis, 2005). The Government has introduced the 'Standard for Childhood Practice' as a way of recognising the status of those involved in childcare and early years and also to improve the standards and quality of provision in this

area. Adam Ingram, Minister for Children and Early Years in the new Scottish Government writes;

*‘Early years and childcare workers throughout Scotland play a key role in providing the care and early education that our children need to help them get off to the best start in life. They are critical in providing good quality services and contributing towards positive outcomes for children and families. That is why I am committed to a programme to improve their status and professionalism ...’*

Ingram (2008, iv)

The key features of the new standards are;

- One framework for the whole sector
- Services will be led by a qualified professional (Level 9 SCQF)
- Entry and exit points at each level
- A mixture of college, university and workbased learning
- Prior learning will be recognised and accredited
- Progression and CPD will be supported
- A shared knowledge and skills base across children’s services

It is suggested that these standards will provide opportunities for a better understanding of the roles each agency plays in the lives of children and families and provide improved dialogue and communication at organisational and individual level (Christie and Menmuir, 2005). I suggest that the professionalising of the childcare and early years workforce will be welcomed by many, if not most of those involved in the sector. Over the years they have been regarded as the ‘Cinderella’ service with poor levels of pay and conditions and a lack of progression routes for staff. The adoption of the Childhood Standards offers a number of ways for staff to access education and training opportunities that will allow them to progress both vertically,

i.e. to promoted posts or horizontally, i.e. through opportunities to develop within their role. Linked to this standards approach there is a growing movement towards the adoption of a social pedagogy model of education and training in Scotland.

## **Social Pedagogy Model of Education and Training**

It is clear that in Scotland we are looking for ways to ensure the services delivered meet quality assurance standards and the needs of a modern welfare state. There appears to be a movement in Scotland towards a social pedagogy model of education and training that has its roots in the welfare reform agenda (Moss, 2006; Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2008; Patrick et al, 2003; Smith and Whyte, 2007). As discussed in chapter five, over the last ten years we have seen the state 'professionalising' occupations through seminal reports i.e. Teaching; A Profession for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; Social work; Report of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Review etc. However, as discussed above, this reform has excluded a large number of welfare providers across a range of settings including family support workers, childcare and early year's workers, youth workers etc. It appears that many agencies are now starting to recognise the potential of these workers and the benefits that a social pedagogy model of education and training might bring.

The term pedagogy has different meanings within the U.K and Europe. In the U.K. it has been narrowly defined as the 'science of education', whereas in the continent it is understood as 'education in its broadest sense and pedagogy is a body of theory and practice ... it aims to support an individual's resources for their own development' (Cameron, 2006, 9). Those who deliver the work, 'pedagogues' are argued to work holistically with the child or family. Moss (2006) describes the relationship as;

*'The pedagogue has a relationship with the child which is both personal and professional. S/he relates to the child at a level of a person, rather than as a meaning of attaining adult goals. This interpersonal relationship implies reciprocity and mutuality, and an approach that is individualised but not individualistic'.*

Moss (2006, 188)

The key features of social pedagogy are:

- Focus on the whole child and support for the child's development
- Social solidarity with the community in which they work
- Understanding of cultural identity
- Promotion of democratic values
- High level of theoretical training and reflective practice
- Emphasis on teamwork

Cohen, (2008)

The social pedagogy model offers education and training that would allow for a more flexible workforce able to work across all settings. It would provide:

*'A single qualification that provides a common set of skills and knowledge for all those who work with children. It would not replace specialist education, but enable common modules to be added to initial education across professions'.*

Children in Scotland (2008, 2)

Cameron (2006, 12) suggests that the interest in the social pedagogy model of education and training is due to the fact that it does provide some of the answers to the reform agenda and where there is recognition that existing welfare provision cannot meet the needs of children and young people in terms of 'supply or quality' It is suggested that by adopting the social pedagogy model that '...it has the potential to encourage new way of working' (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2007). At a Conference (Children in Scotland, 2007) Paul Ennals was very critical of the social pedagogy model and he described the following (I have paraphrased his discussion but am sure I have captured the essence);

**‘What do we want a fruit salad or a fruit smoothy?’**

*I want to see a fruit salad where all of the agencies with their vibrant differences, contribute to children’s welfare and makes an interesting and tasty dish. Rather than everyone undergoing the same training and it produces a bland uninteresting dish’.*

Ennals (Children in Scotland, 2007)

Whilst I have some sympathy for this view, I suspect that Ennals has overlooked the fact that some childhood practioners on the ground would not be considered by practitioners in other services as being ‘worthy’ additions to the fruit salad. Indeed, it may be that the fruit smoothly approach will at least offer those children and family workers who are not social workers, nurses, community education workers or teachers the opportunity to upgrade their skills and be regarded as a practitioner who is a member of a specific profession and contributes equally to the delivery of children and family services.

The Scottish Government has indicated that it is considering the social pedagogy model of education and training as one possible option within Scotland but it is at a very early stage. Adam Ingram (2008) reports that they want to use this year (2008) to discuss the Children’s Sector Workforce and how to develop long term sustainable education and training for this sector. The social pedagogy model and the new Standard for Childhood Practice both indicate that the state is keen to professionalise the children’s sector workforce including those who have been traditionally excluded from this process. The following section discusses the pros and cons of this and the implications for family support work as a new or emerging profession.

As discussed above, we have seen the state ‘professionalising’ occupations through seminal reports i.e. Teaching: A Profession for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; Social work: Report of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Review; and Community Learning and Development: Empowered to Practice. In exchange for this recognition the state has regulated training and regulatory requirements for these occupations i.e. General Teaching Council, the CEVE and the Scottish Social Services Council. Knowledge, autonomy, power etc all attributes of ‘professions’ are now mediated through the state and there



are now standardised and routinised concept of education applied to these professions. Indeed, some would argue that the training under these new professions has become impoverished and where the importance lies within achieving technical success rather than developing an understanding of societal issues (Bottery, 1998: Ozga, 2000).

Ironically, at the very time that the line between professions is becoming clearer, professionals have argued that they have been ‘deprofessionalised’ and that they are ‘losing their position of prestige and trust’ (Haug in Friedson, 1994, 130). Although the deprofessionalisation discourse has been challenged by writers such as MacDonald (1995) and Friedson (1994), it is fairly clear that the modernising government agenda has led to professionalism being determined ‘... not by autonomy ... but rather by the extent to which that profession is effective’ (Patrick et al, 2003, 11). The social pedagogy model of education and training is argued to overcome some of these concerns by re-engaging in the debate regarding social welfare and seeks solutions to social problems through exploring the problems ‘... within the normative conceptions of learning or ‘upbringing’, rather than a focus on deficits’ (Smith and Whyte, 2007). This model appears to have ‘space’ in which to debate the narrowing of the professions. However, at this early stage it will be interesting to see how this develops and how it would fit into the Standards Framework in place across Scotland.

In exploring professions within a local authority setting, they all have a common set of indicators relating to their professions. These include: Professional Values; Professional knowledge; and Professional Skills and Abilities (Scottish Government, 2007b). Linked to these indicators, professionals have to register with professional bodies. It is argued that that this has benefits for each profession: They will;

- Be part of a clearly defined community of practice
- Have an established CPD programme
- Establish a clear set of expectations of employees and employers

This has given each profession 'protection' where their role and function has been recognised by the state. For example, the Review of social work indicated that the title of 'social worker' was protected and that social work also had 'protected' functions, which 'should only be carried out by, or under the supervision of registered social workers' (Scottish Executive, 2006a, 26). This also gives the practitioner 'protection' within the workplace against changes to their role and remit. The following section discusses challenges to the family support work role within Pentesk Council where this 'protection' does not exist.

### **Practitioner Protection Yet Another Challenge to Family Support Work**

Family support work has no clear role or function within the authority and due to this family support workers have no protection against sudden changes of direction. This study has demonstrated how the family support worker role has been punctuated by change and challenge. The latest challenge to staff within Pentesk Council comes from the 'single status' agreement relating to roles, responsibilities, terms and conditions of workers. The Single Status Agreement was signed up to by all local authorities and the Trades Unions in Scotland in 1999. The agreement committed local authorities to devise and implement a pay and grading system to address the inequalities between different groups of employees (Pentesk Council 2008e). The model adopted by Pentesk Council has been a 'job families' approach. In this approach they have categorised the work according to the nature of the work done and the level of skill and responsibility associated with the work. There appears to be two levels where family support work might sit:

- Para-Professional and Technical – feature a strong service delivery element based upon specific fields of knowledge gained through a combination of vocational or academic qualifications

- Care – this role is the public face of service provision where staff undertake a range of practical and professional activities to ensure safety and deliver a quality service to children and adults

Pentesk Council (2008e, 4)

It will be interesting to see where family support work comes within this approach. Anecdotally, friends and colleagues who have been through this process in other authorities report that staff with ill-defined roles i.e. home-school worker, family support worker, and school liaison worker have come off badly (i.e. although their salaries are preserved for three years, their terms and conditions have been reduced and their status as delivering a professional service has been undermined).

In addition to the implementation of single status, the authority is also undergoing a rationalisation programme due to budget overspends. Each department has been requested to make proposals for substantial budget cuts. I have argued throughout this thesis that family support work is vulnerable to change within the authority due to the lack of clarity of role and purpose. This may be yet one more example of how this lack of clarity will impact on staff.

I suggest that despite the concerns of the ‘de-professionalisation, or re-professionalisation’ debate, family support work would benefit from being part of a recognised ‘professional’ body whether it be through the Standard for Childhood Practice or the adoption of the social pedagogy model of education and training as both offer opportunities to redefine the family support work role within Pentesk Council. This would set family support work within a framework which is recognised by other service providers as a ‘profession’. Family support work would then have a clearly defined role within the authority with CPD and progression routes built in. This is missing at present and has contributed to the relatively large turnover of staff and the ongoing tension within the authority regarding the family support work role.

## CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER SIX

This chapter has discussed a range of issues that have impacted on the role of family support work within Pentesk Council and concludes that whilst family support work lacks clarity of role and purpose, there are real opportunities to revisit this within the authority. The chapter has indicated that a convergence of policy, practice and crisis within the authority has led family support work to being vulnerable to change due to pragmatism rather than through a clear philosophical understanding of the impact of these changes. The chapter also discussed opportunities for addressing this vulnerability through the GIRFEC agenda currently taking place within the authority and through the adoption of a clear theoretical underpinning. The chapter concluded by suggesting that family support work could be part of a new or emerging profession and highlighted two clear possible routes for this through the 'Standard for Childhood Practice' and the adoption of a social pedagogy model of family support work training.

I have to say that at this stage whilst it appears that there may be opportunities to clarify the role of family support work, I am not optimistic about the future of family support work within Pentesk Council. I indicated above that whilst there are opportunities through the GIRFEC agenda and the New Standard for Childhood Practice and the social pedagogy model, there are threats to this through the restructuring and the single status agenda. I have reported throughout this thesis that family support work is vulnerable and open to sudden change without any clear philosophical reason due to the lack of clear remit and profile. It may well be that these developments will impact on the role of family support work within the authority. If it does get downgraded (or disappears) I will be very sad because it appears to me that family support work is one of the few areas in child welfare that is committed to working holistically with the whole family.

It is interesting that at the beginning of this study I was attempting to clarify the role of family support work with a view to improving retention and through this improving the service offered to children and families. I find it hard to believe that at

the end of the study I am unsure if family support work will exist within Pentesk Council and what form (if any) it will be allowed to take. My hope is that this study will be employed to enable the council to clearly define the family worker role but this will be very dependent on senior strategic managers in Pentesk who may have vested interests relating to other professional allegiances or pragmatic issues of resourcing. The current political and financial climate will have implications for the further development of family support work within Pentesk Council; however, I argue strongly that the authority should not retreat from their aspiration of the bid to the Scottish Executive to refocus their welfare services. Although the authority has been through and will go through even more challenges, we must keep children and families at the forefront of our service delivery. It is my hope that the authority will not lose sight of the original bid to refocus its children and family services during this difficult time and that there will be opportunities for family support work to grow and develop both within Pentesk Council and in the U.K.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Conclusion to the Study**

As discussed in chapter one, the aim of this study was to investigate the development of family support work within one local authority in Scotland with a view to clarifying the role and in doing this it was anticipated that it would lead to improved staff retention and ultimately a better service for children and families. This chapter discusses how my research approach assisted me to achieve my aim and discusses key findings from the study. The chapter has three sections:

- Section one briefly reviews the chapters in the study
- Section two discussion of the thesis
- Section three discusses the possibilities for development of family support in the next five to ten years

This thesis concludes that it is possible for family support work to operate across service silos but this can only happen where there is a clear vision for the role of family support within integrated children's services.

#### **Section One: Review of Chapters in the Study**

In chapter one I outlined my interest in this topic, its importance and why I thought it merited studying at EdD level. I suggested that family support workers had come into a relatively new, well paid post but did not stay very long. They cited issues such as a lack of shared understanding of the family support work role; lack of professional respect for their skills and expertise and the lack of progression opportunities as reasons they found the job difficult. Their views and my curiosity to understand why we were not retaining staff led me to undertake this study. I had a 'fire in my belly' (Bassey, 2003) about this research topic. I wanted to explore the reasons why we were not retaining staff because it seemed to contradict the very aim

of our new service. That is, we had asked this group of staff to come out of their traditional 'professions' to become part of integrated children's services teams yet (despite our best intentions) the staff reported that they did not feel valued within the authority.

In chapter two I discussed my literature review which outlined that family support work at a national and international level emerged from a complex interplay of philosophical, governmental, policy and practice change. The review highlighted the 'shift' from the 'moral underclass' discourse of the Conservative Government to the 'social integrationist' discourse of New Labour. It also highlighted the changes in welfare service delivery from the reactive approaches to the more proactive, preventable services. The review explored the 'shift' in the concept of the family and the participation of children and families in the decision making process. Family support work emerged from these complex processes but it was unclear from the literature 'what' family support work was and 'who' delivered it.

Chapter three outlined my methodology, how I intended to undertake this research. It suggested that research involves interplay between the researcher's ontological and epistemological stances (i.e. the nature of the study and how it can be understood) and pragmatic issues (i.e. funding and timing, etc). It also explained the critical theory approach that underpinned my investigation. Hammersley (2007, 3) explains that 'Critical research explicitly extends the assessment to social practices and institutional arrangements and the evaluation of these is usually in terms of some notion of equity or social justice'. This study sought to investigate inequalities in the development of the family support work within Pentesk Council.

This chapter also outlined my thinking behind my research questions. It demonstrated that my choice of questions was influenced by areas such as: my own experience as a manager; information from the exit interviews with staff; information from a review of the literature, etc. It also, after a lengthy process of elimination, defined my research question as simply: 'What is Family Support Work within the Context of this local authority?'

This chapter also discussed how I:

- Decided on the research question and sub questions
- Decided on my chosen research method, qualitative research
- Built on my theoretical stance ‘critical theory’
- Decided on my ‘methods’ for collecting the data (e.g. using the authority as a case study and employing semi structured interviews)
- Problematised notions such as ‘validity’ and ‘reflexivity’
- Ensured all aspects of the study were undertaken ethically
- Decided on the study sample
- Decided on the methods for processing the information into data and analysing the data

When reflecting on the methods chapter it appeared to read like a linear process, starting at point ‘a’ moving on the point ‘b’ etc. However, this study encountered a number of problems with the chosen methods and the following chapter captured this in more detail.

Chapter Four discussed the difficulties I encountered during the fieldwork process. It concluded that these were due to a combination of issues relating to planning processes, governmental, policy and practice change. This chapter discussed the impact of the poor child protection report within Pentesk Council and the repercussions that reverberated throughout the authority. It also discussed the impact of the new Scottish Government and some subsequent policy changes. At a more local level the chapter identified and explained the difficulties I encountered gaining access to a key stakeholder and parents. It demonstrated that the processes of information gathering was helpful and relevant for the study because it created early ‘data’ about people’s attitudes that could be analysed to understand the context



within which family support work was situated. A number of key themes emerged from chapter four;

- Tensions between early intervention and higher tariff work: the lack of clarity of the terminology which influenced the development of the family support work role
- Family support work as a refocusing of welfare services: an exploration of the issues that helped or hindered this process
- Skills and qualifications of family support workers: an exploration of the perception that family support workers had low-level skills
- Lack of parental involvement in the development of the family support work role and how they have experienced the service, which had competing demands, made of it

The chapter concluded that despite difficulties gaining access to some respondents, I had managed to gain some valuable data which highlighted key themes and the tensions and difficulties in the development of family support work within Pentesk Council.

Chapter five explored the key themes identified above and established that family support work within Pentesk Council emerged from a very complex mix of national political/policy change and local interpretation. It concluded that there was no agreed strategic or shared view of what family support is in the context of Pentesk Council and that this lack of agreement left family support work vulnerable (e.g. open to sudden changes of direction). Chapter five highlighted that Family support work was viewed by some respondents as a warm cosy low cost initiative rather than as a 'change agent' that should help the authority to integrate children's services. The study found that there were differing understandings of key terms such as 'early intervention', 'high and low tariff' and that this led to tensions between services delivering support to families. This

chapter also found that the different meanings ascribed to these words helped to create a 'boundary' around some services. For example, some services indicated that their role was to only deliver child protection services. This chapter also demonstrated that despite 'early intervention' being the cornerstone of governmental policy, early intervention services within Pentesk Council appeared to be valued less than services delivering 'child protection'.

Chapter six discussed the issues that impacted on the development of family support work and explored opportunities at both local and national level to clarify the role of this service. It established that within Pentesk Council there is an opportunity to define the family support worker role through the new GIRFEC agenda (Scottish Executive, 2005a). It indicated that agencies within Pentesk Council are 'positioning' themselves within three levels of provision: universal, targeted and specialist. This chapter discussed the view of some respondents that family support work could operate at universal and targeted level. It concluded that before this could happen family support work would need to be underpinned by a clear theoretical/philosophical position such as 'social support' theory (Dolan et al, 2006). This chapter indicated that this finding was important because theory helps us to understand processes taking place in the wider world i.e. power, mediation, class struggle etc (Giroux, 2001; Ozga, 2000).

The chapter also explored the possibility of 'professionalising' family support work through the new Standard for Childhood Practice (Scottish Government, 2007b) and the adoption of a social pedagogy model to staff training (Cameron, 2006). It argued that each of these opportunities offers family support work the 'protection' they are missing at present because they would be part of a recognised community of practice with clear development pathways. The chapter also concluded that there are 'threats' to the process of professionalising family support work such as the 'single status' agenda and the financial constraints that presently influence developments within Pentesk Council.

## **Section Two: Discussion**

Undertaking this study has been an interesting journey for me, initially this study was undertaken to investigate the reasons why family support workers did not stay in post very long. It was anticipated that the data could contribute to discussions within the authority concerning staff retention and service development. This study was not concerned with proving that family support workers were ‘victims’ within the authority. On the contrary, I was curious to find out why family support workers had come into well paid permanent posts but did not stay very long. This study is my ‘story’ of the development of family support work within Pentesk Council undertaken through a combination of my theoretical position and utilising reflexive practice to ensure that I have critically examined my own interpretations and ‘... looked at one’s own perspectives from other perspectives, and turning a self critical eye onto one’s own authority as interpreter and author’ (Alevesson and Skoldberg, 2005, vii). Within this small-scale study I have taken a considered position due to developing an understanding of the issues and difficulties faced by stakeholders at all levels. I understand that the position I have taken may not necessarily be shared with other staff members or key stakeholders within the authority but I have found it liberating because it has enabled me to carefully consider the views and life contexts of people who previously I might have ignored because I thought they were prejudiced about family support work. I have been able to set aside those differences and consider the practical issues that influenced people’s views of family support work.

This study has shown that there was a lack of clarity about the family support work role. The bid to the Scottish Executive perceived the role as working across the boundary of other service providers to effect change. Yet others within the study and on the periphery of the bid processes viewed it as a low cost, low tariff role. I concluded that family support work has no clear theoretical or philosophical position within the authority and this has left it vulnerable to changes of direction based on no clear reasoning. In discussing my thesis conclusion with a key stakeholder, they commented, ‘not only have the goalposts been moved, they moved the pitch as well’.

I think this comment sums up the family support work role well. The study has shown that the development of family support work has taken place in a complex world of governmental, policy and practice change and that this has been difficult for everyone involved (Moss and Petrie 2004, Tisdall 2001). Directors and heads of service have had to make tough decisions and sometimes they are made for very pragmatic reasons rather than clear philosophical reasons. This study has helped me see that they too are struggling with this complex agenda and may be making decisions without realising the full implications.

The two families who took part in this study indicated that they benefited from the support given which respected their role as a family having difficulty, and did not 'blame' them for the situation in which they found themselves. Families who took part in a previous study indicated that they wanted services: which involved them in the decision making process; communicated well with them and provided services which met their needs rather than the needs of the service provider. I do question how well we service providers meet these very straight forward requests. Indeed I looked back upon a study I had undertaken six years ago as part of my Masters in advanced Professional Studies and it showed that parents and families were highlighting similar issue then. Although the present study showed that the authority had moved forward since my Masters, it appeared to me that we are some way off viewing parents as key stakeholders in the development of services within the authority.

Information from the literature review and this study shows that there is a need for a new profession to meet the needs of modern welfare delivery and it is my view that family support work could be part of this new agenda if it built on two possibilities for 'professionalisation': the Standard for Childhood Practice (Scottish Government, 2007b) and the adoption of a social pedagogy model to staff training (Cameron, 2006). I suggest that either of these opportunities could provide the framework which is currently missing for family support work i.e. a clear theoretical and philosophical perspective coupled with a clear community of practice. However, I am unsure where the authority is at present regarding the development of family

support work. It may be that pragmatic decisions will be made based on funding issues, local knowledge and understanding rather than decisions being made based on a robust, critical study.

### **Section Three: Development of Family Support in the Next Five to Ten Years**

Despite this study showing that there was no clearly defined role for family support work within Pentesk Council, it is clear from the literature and policy documents that there is an appetite to improve the services delivered to children and families at a local and national level. What this study and the literature on child welfare have shown is that services suffer from wide pendulous swings. Child deaths and the perceived inability of services to protect all children has led to debates about child protection (with the emphasis on surveillance) verses the preventative services (i.e. family support work, Sure Start etc). Coupled with this is the political landscape in which family support work takes place and it is clear that there will be an impact on welfare services due to the current global financial crisis. Pentesk local authority has had to make £5 million cuts across all services in the coming financial year with more cuts to follow next year (Pentesk Council, 2009). However, within these debates and financial cutbacks, I argue that there are opportunities to develop robust family support work with the emphasis on holistic approaches for the whole family. It appears to me that there are three ways in which family support work could move forward;

- Reinforce the present system with legislation: the current legislation on top of current policy and practices may move the agenda forward
- Fine tune the present system to provide 'spaces' to move the family support work agenda forward
- Accept that a fundamental change needs to take place within services to move the family support work agenda forward

This section discusses these possibilities to see how family support work might develop over the next five to ten years.

### **Reinforcing the Present Approach**

This study has shown that the GIRFEC agenda (Scottish Government, 2005) and the Every Child Matters policy (DfES, 2003) in England provide some opportunities for further development of family support work through:

- Encouraging early intervention approaches
- Integrated working between agencies
- Shared communication between agencies
- Increased accountability
- Workforce reform

Despite this policy ‘shift’, this study and the literature have shown that family support work is poorly defined and open to variation and short term change. The study also showed that family support work was not valued in comparison to child protection (see chapters two, five and six). One would have to question why this disparity exists despite a whole range of literature showing that early intervention approaches lead to better outcomes for children and families (DoH, 1995; Millar, 2006). Family support work would appear to support early intervention approaches but it is not a universally accepted service.

In Ireland, family support work is underpinned by legislation which led to the formulation of a ‘...national family support strategy’ (Dolan et al, 2006, 12). So this might suggest that reinforcing the Every Child Matters and GIRFEC policies with legislation might make family support work more universally accepted. Yet this is too simple an answer. Chapter two discussed the Children Act in England and Scotland which led to the development of ‘children in need’ responses where local

authorities were required to make provision for preventative work (Carpenter 1997; Leathard, 1997). Despite this legislation being in place, it was open to local authority interpretation and some authorities used the legislation to 'ration' the services they provided (McGhee and Waterhouse, 2002; Tisdall 1997). Similarly, the whole thrust of the work undertaken by Dolan, Canavan and Pinkerton (2006) has shown that even in Ireland family support work is ill-defined despite being underpinned by legislation.

This suggests that the GIRFEC agenda and the Every Child Matters policies whilst acting as a foundation for the development of children's services, involve a 'technical rationale' approach to child welfare (Ozga, 2000). That is, these policies promote change but do not require children's services practitioners and managers to consider the political context with in which they work. In accepting these policies without question and without a legislative framework it appears to me that services may change but that this will be open to interpretation and local politics. Given the difficulties local authorities will face over the next few years, it may well be that local authorities will be prevented by financial constraint from promoting change in the present system. The following section explores how services could move beyond tinkering at the edges of the system to fine tune the role of family support work.

### **Fine Tuning of the Present System**

As discussed in chapters five and six, children's services require better processes of communication; improved service integration and addressing power relationships within children's services. The literature shows that the child protection model has too narrow a focus and resources are targeted too far downstream (Dolan et al 2006; Millar, 2006). The GIRFEC and Every Child Matters Policies offer opportunities to redress this balance by providing universal and targeted services much earlier for all children. However, (as discussed in chapter six) this study showed that within Pentesk Council agencies were positioning themselves away from preventative end of service provision and moving much more to the targeted/specialist end of the spectrum. This study found that a lack of resources, lack of clarity concerning the

remit and roles of staff/provision and pressure on their services (e.g. increased referrals) had led to the emergence of a rationing approach. This shift to targeted services is not surprising when considered in relation to the finding that there is little evaluation of the effectiveness of preventative services and measuring of their long-term impact on children and families. In contrast, the regular publishing of Child Protection figures by local authorities enables them to justify the setting aside of resources for crisis management of children and families. This suggests that we need more longitudinal studies to enable greater fine tuning of family support work and a shift to more effective upstream targeting of resources.

However, the literature has demonstrated that it is difficult to measure how authorities prevent children coming into statutory processes i.e. the Child Protection register, Children's Hearing System etc (Anning et al, 2006; Frost et al, 2005; Jeffrey, 2003). Indeed, the Westminster and Scottish Governments are attempting to move away from a 'number crunching' output agenda to a more outcomes focused agenda that measures the 'impact' of an intervention on the child, young person, family, community etc (Scottish Government, 2008). This shift provides an opportunity for local authorities to fine-tune their services and to intervene earlier in the age and stage of the family support referral process. Chapter two utilised Gilligan's model (2000) to review the literature around family support work where he discussed family support work under three distinct headings:

- Developmental – addressing universal services for all children and families
- Compensatory – supporting disadvantaged communities
- Protective – supporting individuals and families

Gilligan's model provides a useful way of differentiating between types of family support. However, this study has shown that some problems in service provision persist when we define family support work by outcomes rather than by a shared theoretical understanding. For example, chapter six highlighted the outcomes



focused nature of the original Pentesk Family Support Work proposal. It suggests that this agenda lacks a clear philosophical basis and that this lack of clarity resulted in confusion over the role and nature of family support work within the local authority.

This study has demonstrated (e.g. in chapter five and six) that an outcomes focused approach does not necessarily take into account issues such as:

- Diverse theoretical/philosophical positions of agencies/practitioners
- Power relationships between stakeholders
- Poor Communication with Stakeholders
- Positioning by agencies (e.g. to be the provider of child protection services rather than preventative services)

Whilst evaluation of family support is important, it should not be seen as anything more than an improvement of the present system. In contrast, this thesis by highlighting a lack of clear theoretical foundation for family support both within the literature review (chapter two) and the fieldwork (chapter four), argues that irrespective of the technical rationale approach there has to more consideration of the theoretical constructs that underpin our work with children and families. Some authors argue that workers should have a shared theoretical understanding of children, families, community and service provision (Cameron, 2006; Moss and Petrie, 2004). A shared theoretical understanding may enable more effective family support work. It may provide opportunities to move beyond the child protection focus of elements of the GIRFEC and Every Child Matters agenda to establish a clear philosophy of child welfare services for all children and families. That is, it is argued that a more seismic shift in child welfare provision would move the family support work agenda forward by allowing practitioners to develop similar starting points to their work and enabling different practitioners/agencies to see themselves as working in an integrated service rather than working in service silos.

## **Fundamental Change**

Chapter five and six discussed the possibilities of promoting family support work as an emerging profession and examined the work of a number of authors who argued that more fundamental change could be brought about through the adoption of a social pedagogy model. This model promotes the idea that a philosophical change could be achieved in children's services by developing joint training of children's services workers and a single professional grouping (Cameron, 2006; Cohen, 2008). However, it may well be that in moving towards a Social Pedagogy model that these authors set up a false dichotomy between the generic professional and the status quo – a diverse range of provision by a whole range of professionals. I do not think that at this stage the Government, service providers or indeed individual professional staff are ready for this because of the constraints placed on children's services by local authorities (e.g. chapter five suggested that vested interests, power relations between services/professionals and competition for scarce resources created barriers for the family support work project). In chapter one I outlined that family support workers came from a range of agencies into the family support post but did not find it a rewarding experience. They talked of returning to their 'own professions' where the boundaries and expectations were more clear and this suggests that at present practitioners are a long way off from accepting a Social Pedagogy model.

On reviewing the three options discussed in this section:

- Accept the present system as the current legislation and policy practices may move the agenda forward but it may stay stagnant
- Fine tune the present system to provide 'spaces' to move the family support work agenda forward
- Accept that a fundamental change needs to take place within services to move the family support work agenda forward

I believe that family support work will develop and gather momentum over the next few years but it will happen very slowly. We know for example that a family experiencing difficulties can have: a community psychiatric nurse for mum's mental health issues; a drug agency dealing with dad's drug use; a social worker dealing with the child with disabilities and an education welfare officer dealing with another child's non-attendance does not produce the best outcomes for the family or indeed is the best use of resources. Family support work at present incorporates many of the activities undertaken by this group of professional staff and offers the very best service to children, young people and their families. Many practitioners on the ground, academics and service providers acknowledge that supporting a family holistically is much better than a piecemeal approach but evidencing holistic approaches, getting practitioners to buy into them and overcoming vested interests is extremely problematic.

I believe that there is a movement of likeminded professionals who do not accept that services should adopt the status quo or that tinkering with the present system is the limit of what can be achieved (Barnado's, 2006; Brown, 2003; Chaskin, 2006; Dolan et al 2006; Gilligan, 2000; Utting, 1995). These professionals are moving forward the family support agenda very slowly but surely and in time social support theory and social pedagogue approaches may well provide the framework for much more holistic services. However, I am under no illusion that changing the way services are organised and delivered will take time and that change, whether fine tuning systems or fundamental change, will be very difficult to achieve. For example, The Kilbrandon Report (1964) regarding the Children's Hearing System in Scotland commented;

*'In discussions before us, reference was made by some of the witnesses to the possibility in the long term of an even wider measure of reorganization of services so as to provide a comprehensive 'family service' catering for the needs of adults of all ages, as well as those of children in the family... Our own proposals, however, are necessarily directed primarily to the special needs of a minority of the children who require special measures of education and training. These measures will almost always involve working closely with the parents; helping them to resolve their problems and sometimes those of other adult members of the family unit; and assisting them and strengthening their natural instinct to further the wellbeing of their children We believe that society now and in the future will in fact be prepared to go to considerable lengths and considerable cost to further such a process of education for social living...'*

(Scottish Home and Health Dept, 265, 1964)

This quotation shows that children's welfare providers have been struggling with this issue for over forty years and whilst there have been significant shifts in the philosophy of working with children and families in contemporary UK society, there is still some way to go before we are in a position to provide services which support the whole family. In the meantime this thesis provides a more immediate solution to the lack of theoretical underpinning of family support work. That is, the fieldwork undertaken in this study showed that family support work delivered in Pentesk was not dogmatic and encompassed a range of theoretical perspectives. For example it incorporated;

- Social models
- Medical models
- Child Protection models
- Psychological Models

The case studies shown in chapter five outlined that the family support workers utilised a number of theories in their assessment for example;

- Medical model regarding the child's epilepsy and behaviour traits

- Psychological model regarding the child's education
- Social model regarding the wider issues impacting on the young person's access to services

This finding suggests that whilst the 'social support' theory described by Dolan et al (2006) provides an excellent route map for the development of family support work - no single theoretical position is flexible enough to provide the basis for contemporary family support. The vignettes and case studies in this thesis showed that the recipients of services required different theoretical approaches to support them i.e. individual, medical, psychological and social. This also demonstrated that in order to achieve such complex and flexible support local authorities needed to establish proper integrated assessment (in keeping with GIRFEC) but also to go beyond integrated assessment and establish creative dialogue in local area forums between professionals who hold competing philosophical starting points (see chapter six). This will create a space (in keeping with Moss and Petrie) where vested interests, resource problems and power relations can be recognised, discussed and worked upon in order to meet the needs of service users as well as service providers. This approach resolves the problems of one agency dumping on another by recognising the needs, pressures and aspiration of service users and different service providers.

Alvesson and Skoldberg (2005, 132) write that critical theory supports the idea of an independent critical researcher who '... asks questions which are an insult to common sense, the idea being to promote a kind of thinking which differs radically from established modes ... not simply adapting to the conventional views'. I argue that this study has engaged in this process and has not simply accepted the conventional view of family support work. The study has explored the tensions and difficulties and concluded that there are opportunities and threats to the development within Pentesk Council. One of the criticisms of critical theory is that 'the main preoccupation is to produce an account which will have desirable political consequences, rather than to ensure its validity' (Hammersley, 2007). It is my intention that readers of this study

will see that by underpinning this study with critical theory I have been able to produce a measured account which highlights key areas of tension in the development of family support work within Pentesk Council, rather than a one sided political account of the difficulties.

Critical theory has enabled me to avoid viewing family support work as 'less than' other services and illustrate that it is integral to the work that we all undertake with children, young people and families. Critical theory has also enabled me to step back from my own vested interests and discover that family support work has evolved within a complex social system that has created tensions and pressures for all service managers. This thesis concludes that it is possible for family support work to operate across service silos but this can only happen where there is a clear vision for the role of family support within integrated children's services.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix 1

### Letters to Respondents

#### Professionals Letter

May 2007

Dear Colleague

#### **Thesis Proposal: What is Family Support Work?**

**A case study within the context of one local authority in Scotland.**

You may be aware that I am undertaking research into the role of family support work within the authority as my thesis for a Doctorate in Education through Edinburgh University. The purpose of this research is to clarify the role of FSW within Integrated Children's Services in Pentesk. It is anticipated that through this research the role of FSW will be clarified, leading to improved staff retention, which may in turn lead to improved services for children and families.

The research will be undertaken through interpretive qualitative research methods using the authority as a case study. I intend to use semi-structured interviews with a range of stakeholders involved in Integrated Children's Services in Pentesk. The interviews will last approximately 30 – 45 minutes and will be recorded using a digital recorder. It is anticipated that the outcome of these interviews will be the development of key themes from the data rather than verbatim transcription of the tapes. This research proposal has been endorsed both by Director of Education and through Edinburgh University Ethics Committee. I would like to invite you to take part in this study and list below what this will entail.

I would like to meet with you to undertake a 'semi-structured' interview, which would last approximately 30- 45 minutes. This would take the form of a question/answer session designed to elicit your views on the development of this post. I will record the interview with a tape recorder, but if you do not wish me to do this I will record the interview on paper. In agreeing to take part in this research I give you the following guarantees;

- The research will be undertaken ethically using the BERA guidelines

- Any information you give will remain strictly confidential
- Any quotations used in the study will be anonymised both in terms of name and job title
- Only myself and my thesis supervisors will have access to the information you give
- Digital recordings will be transcribed by myself and your voice will not be used in any presentations
- If requested, I can provide you with a copy of the discussion we have had

If you are willing to take part in this research, please give me a call to arrange a suitable date and time. If you wish more information prior to making a decision, please do not hesitate to give me a call.

It would also help in my research if you let me know that you do not want to take part, that way I will not follow up with unwanted telephone calls or e-mails.

Many thanks for your support.

Yours sincerely

Mary Smith



## Letter to Parents/Carers

Sept 2007

Dear Parent/Carer

### Research Proposal: What is Family Support Work?

I am a part-time student at Edinburgh University and I am doing some research for my employer, Pentesk Council. This research is looking at the role of family support work as a way of supporting children and families. It is hoped that through this research that the role of family support work will be more clear and due to this staff will stay longer in post. The outcome of this is that it should lead to a better service for children and families in Pentesk. This research proposal has been agreed both by Director of Education, and through Edinburgh University Ethics Committee to make sure that I have followed all the ethical guidelines and that you or your family will not be identified through anything that you say or do if you agree to take part.

Some time ago you received support from a family support worker and I would like to meet with you to discuss the support you received and if it met the needs of you and your family. I would also like to hear your views on what you think the role of family support should be. Your views are really important in this research and will help us to identify what parents and families need from this role.

The meeting can take place in an area where you feel most comfortable, for example in your home, here in our office, at the school/nursery, or we can perhaps book a place to suit your needs. The meeting will last for around 30 minutes and I will record the meeting on a digital recorder. This allows me to concentrate on what you are saying rather than writing lots of notes. However if you feel uncomfortable with me recording the interview then I will just take notes. In agreeing to take part in this research I give you the following guarantees;

- The research will be undertaken ethically using the BERA guidelines

*These guidelines set out actions that researchers must take in order to protect the people they are researching.*

- Any information you give will remain strictly confidential

*The discussions are between you and me only it will not be shared with anyone from Pentesk Council.*

- Any quotations used in the study will be not have anything in them that could identify you or your family

*You may say something in the interview that is really interesting and I might use that quote but I will not identify who said it. I might say something like*

*'respondent A. felt that FSW really helped their family when they needed it'. Or respondent B indicated that the support they required was too late to help them.*

- Only myself and my thesis supervisors will have access to the information you give.

**My thesis supervisors are also covered by BERA guidelines so will not give out any information.**

- Digital recording will be transcribed by myself and your voice will not be used in any presentations

*If I was giving a presentation on the results of this research I will not use the recording of any participants.*

- If requested, I can provide you with a copy of the discussion we have had

*If you would like to see a copy of the discussion we have had, I can provide this, just ask me.*

The one thing I need to add is that I am bound by Pentesk Council's Child Protection Guidelines so that if you said anything to me which indicated that your child(ren) were at risk from harm then I would have to take action. I don't think that this will happen but I need to make sure you are aware of this.

If you are willing to take part in this research, please give me a call to arrange a suitable date and time. If you wish more information prior to making a decision, please do not hesitate to give me a call to discuss further.

It will also help in this research if you let me know that you do not want to take part, you do not need to give a reason, that way I will not follow up with unwanted telephone calls or letters.

Yours Sincerely

Mary Smith

## **Appendix 2**

### **Interpretation of Interview**

**Mary Smith Research 2007**

**What is Family support Work? A Case Study within the context of one local authority in Scotland.**

**Interview 4<sup>th</sup> July 2007**

Please find below a transcription of the main points made during my interview with you. As discussed, this is not a verbatim transcription. If you agree with what has been written could you please sign and date the paper and return to me for use in the course of my research. If there are areas of dispute could you please telephone/contact me to discuss further.

Many thanks for taking time to take part in this research I very much value your input.

Kind Regards

Mary Smith

#### **What is Family Support work?**

Family Support workers are neutral and work more informally with children and families.

Strength of the service is also the weakness in that it is neutral and works beyond traditional boundaries, staff may feel less supported.

#### **What activities do FSW undertake?**

Practical Family work around issues such as housing, furniture, behaviour and pointing family in the direction of appropriate supports through the assessment process.

Family support role is consistent and constant in the family life, where you are setting long term goals with the family. Dealing with multiple complex issues, rather than single issues means that the FSW helps make and support connections to single agency support.

Families who need support may get from twenty different agencies but it may not meet their needs and having a FSW may mean that there is an overview of the family's needs rather than the needs of the professionals involved.

Also, the turnover in these generic posts is not high so there is less opportunity for staff to move upwards, so it may be that they have to move away to gain promotion but in the longer term, they may come back to us.

Regarding training there is a debate in colleges and university to open up access to these types of post. Within the Council we have discussed extensively joint training opportunities. At a national level, the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland have raised the issue of training and debate the issue of widening access to teaching from a range of professions.

### **Evaluation – How is FSW evaluated?**

As far as I am aware there is not overall assessment of the integration teams. It Ad-hoc at the moment. My gut reaction is that we have achieved a lot in a short space of time. It is perceived by users as a service they want. Measures and hard figures are difficult to quantify the NCS measures of a reduction in school exclusions or the number of pieces of fruit a child takes do not necessarily tell us if there has been a change in people's lives.

Yes we should record information from families but we must not get hung up on targets, which are important, but they are not everything. Even five-year-olds can tell us what they need and it is that area where we should engage getting feedback from families, children and young people. We need to gather data on;

Figures are valid, but it would be good to see a longitudinal study of the effects of support on young people and families but this won't happen. We need to build up a profile of young people and record their successes as well as their difficulties.

### **What Contribution does FSW make to integrated Services in Pentesk?**

Discussion related to integrated children's services but included the work of family support workers.

### **Where do you see FSW in 5 years?**

FSW should be seen in the context of Integrated Children's Services and we need;

- to get back to the early intervention work. Issue of SW put pressure on FSW role where they are working at a far higher level.
- We need to talk about the successes of this work as our good work goes largely unnoticed.

- A Robust evaluation of the work they do and how this impacts on children and families.

**In order to support the development of the FSW role:**

- We must get recruitment and retention correct
- We must create progression routes
- And we must achieve consistency across the four teams
- We need training to encourage people to become FSW
- Joint training FSW with other professions

Signed:

Date

## **Appendix 3**

### **1st Order Principles**

#### **Data Analysis: First Order Principles**

The previous chapters have discussed my interest in family support work and how I carried out research to illuminate the topic. In chapter four, I discussed how I began the process of data analysis through ‘first and second’ order principles (Knight, 2002; Munn, 2006). This appendix shows how I moved from the collating the data from the interviews to begin a process of initial analysis. Due to the limited word count in this thesis I have decided to use this information as an appendix so that the reader can see how I have moved from the initial analysis stage through to in-depth analysis. This appendix outlines the range of quotes which underpinned the themes that emerged first order analysis. In order to avoid cluttering up the main text they have been provided here as an example of the range of ‘voices’ of the respondents (Alvesson, 2002; Hertz, 1997). I undertook this first stage of the analysis by looking at the respondents responses to the questions, from these ‘voices’ I then looked for responses, which illuminated a particular area, or responses, which were similar or diametrically opposed. It is through these ‘voices’ of the respondents that I began to collate data for this study, which was then compared and contrasted with theory, policy, practice and my own experience to begin to develop a picture of the role of family support work within Pentesk Council.

The initial analysis of the interviews indicated that there were a number of views on the role of family support work and its place within children’s services delivery. These included;

- There is no shared view of the role of family support work
- There are a diversity of activities carried out under the heading of family support work
- Family support work is viewed by some as filling a ‘gap’ in services

- There is no strategic context for evaluating family support work
- Family support work is viewed by some as being subordinate to social work
- There is no clear view of the contribution family support work makes to child welfare
- The future of family support work within Pentesk Council is unclear

The data is separated in to the questions asked during the fieldwork process.

**Question One: ‘What is family support work within the context of this authority?’**

There were a number of quotes that outlined different definitions of family support including:

- non crisis work
- early intervention work
- capacity building
- non deficit approaches to child welfare

**Non-crisis work**

*‘Family support work is about working with families as early as possible, it is not crisis intervention. Family support workers are neutral and work more informally with children and families’*

(Respondent 2, Fieldnotes)

## **Early Intervention/Capacity Building**

*'In my view family support work is undertaken with the family at a very early stage and it is very much 'hands-on' working with parents to build their capacity so that they can either take or regain control of their own lives'.*

(Respondent 7, Fieldnotes)

## **Non Deficit Approaches**

*'Family support work for me is about a breadth of service which has the focus on working with families in a positive way. It does not concentrate on deficits within parenting but seeks to explore positive ways to support children and families'*

(Respondent 9, Fieldnotes)

The respondents above came from different professional areas of the authority yet appear to have a shared view of what family support work is i.e.; early intervention; strength focussed; empowering; etc. Other respondents appeared to differ on their definition of family support work and where it should fit with child welfare services. These respondents saw family support work as being subordinate to social work or as filling a 'gap' in children's services provision.

## **Subordinate to Social Work**

*'I see family support work as very much a social work role where the family support worker provides support to the social worker. The duties they might undertake include; intensive support with practical issues; supervising contact with families; advising the parent and so on'.*

(Respondent 5, Fieldnotes)



## Filling a Gap

*'Family support works within the very grey area of work that is not child protection yet it is not early intervention. We have to question whether family support work is a service which supports families or is it about providing 'something' or support where there is no other appropriate service available'*

(Respondent 4, Fieldnotes)

*'Family support work over the last few years has bridged the gap between education and social work'.*

(Respondent 10, Fieldnotes)

The responses to the main question (What is family support work within the context of Pentesk Council?) indicated that there was a wide range of understandings and concepts from the respondents. These included viewing family support work as:

- Building capacity
- A non deficit approach to child welfare
- An empowering approach
- Filling a gap in welfare provision
- A new form of 'para-professional' service

### **Question Two: What activities do the family support workers undertake?**

Within the data there was a diversity of views based on the respondents understanding of the role or what they thought that family support workers might do. Seven respondents described an array of activities that they were aware of that were undertaken by family support workers (respondents 2, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12). This included:

- Practical work i.e. helping a family with their housing issues or helping a family budget
- One-to-one work with individual children
- One-to-one work with individual families
- Groupwork in schools and communities
- Advocacy work
- Assessment
- Parenting work in the home and in groups
- Statutory work i.e. writing reports for Children's Hearings or undertaking work in relation to a supervision order
- Multi-agency work i.e. working with schools and locality forums
- Signposting to other agencies
- Capacity building.
- Joint work with social work, health visitors, class teachers

It was very clear from the data that the expectations of the family support worker role was complex and varied and included the idea that family support work would act as the 'lead professional' in case work and undertake full assessments of cases.

### **Complex and Varied**

*'Family support work falls under three categories: individual work with children and families; capacity building and working with other agencies. This role includes: assessment; therapeutic work with children, relationship building, parenting work; attendance at Child Protection case conferences and Children's Hearings; Forum Planning Meetings and joint work with other services'.*

(Respondent 3, Fieldnotes)

## **Lead professional role**

*'Family Support workers undertake practical work around issues such as housing, behaviour support and pointing the family in the direction of appropriate supports. Family support workers are dealing with multiple complex issues rather than single issues and this means that a family support worker helps make connections to single agency support'.*

(Respondent 2, Fieldnotes).

## **Assessment**

*'The main work that family support workers undertake is an assessment to see what the issues are. From this there is either direct work with the parents addressing issues such as practical support i.e. helping with rent arrears or housing issues or helping the parent manage the child's behaviour. Or from the assessment, directing the family to appropriate supports'.*

(Respondent 5, Fieldnotes)

## **Question Three: How is Family Support Work Evaluated?**

The following question explores 'evaluation', one of the cornerstones of effective service delivery. How do we know that what we are providing is meeting the needs of the service users? It was also one of the key areas lacking in the literature review (see page 31). I wanted to find out how family support work was evaluated to determine the effectiveness of it and how the information from these evaluations (if any) was used. From eleven interviews with professional staff there was a mixed response. Five respondents indicated that they thought that no evaluation had been carried out (1, 2, 3, 5, and 6). Three respondents indicated that they were unsure if some form of evaluation was undertaken (7, 8, and 10). Whilst three staff (4, 9, 12) all indicated that some form of evaluation takes place.

## **No Evaluation**

*‘My gut reaction is that we have achieved a lot in a short space of time, it is perceived by users as a service they want. Measures and hard figures do not necessarily tell us if there has been a change in people’s lives’*

(Respondent 2, Fieldnotes)

*‘I am not sure how this is done or even if it is done’.*

(Respondent 7, Fieldnotes)

## **No Framework for Evaluation**

*‘Due to the lack of a strategic context there is not a systematic evaluation of the supports families receive’.*

(Respondent 1, Fieldnotes)

*‘At present we have not got a framework of quality assurance which is shared consistently across the authority but I am aware that evaluation takes place at the locality level through individual case evaluation and evaluation of planned work’.*

(Respondent 9, Fieldnotes)

The lack of evaluation within the authority raised concern for me. How did the authority know that what was being delivered met the needs of children and families? Family support work was being delivered within the authority, but there did not appear to be a shared view of what it is, what is being delivered and how effective this is in supporting children and families.

## **Question Four: What Contribution Does Family Support Make to Integrated Children’s Services in Pentesk Council?**

As a follow-on from the evaluation question, I wanted to know what respondents thoughts were on the contribution of family support work within the authority over

the last four years. I was met with an interesting array of replies from ‘no clear view’ (respondents 3, and 8) to further study required (respondents 1 and 2) to filling the gap between Child protection and Children in Need (respondents 4, 7, 10) to relationship building between education and social work (5, 6, 9, 12).

### **Not Recognised**

*‘I think that the contribution of Family support work over the last four years has not been recognised. To me it appears to be viewed as an ‘add-on’ rather than a strategic approach to ensuring an emphasis on keeping families together. I think that family support work makes a really valuable contribution to integrated children’ services but I would find it hard to provide ‘proof or evidence’.*

(Respondent, 5, Fieldnotes)

### **No Clear View**

*‘There is no clear view of what family support is or does. Families experience different services from different teams. There is no strategic view of what family support work is and its impact on the professional role. There is no career structure within the authority and the ‘professional’ family support worker role is on the whole is viewed as being wishy-washy’.*

(Respondent 3 Fieldnotes)

### **More information needed**

*‘Family support work services in general provide a range of services across the authority. We need to get a clearer picture of who provides supports, who provides public information, who provides more targeted services and how they are delivered’*

(Respondent 1, Fieldnotes)

## **Fills a Gap**

*'I think that family support work is very valuable but has moved away from the original goal of early intervention. Family support work is being pushed to fill the gap between Child Protection and Children in Need without a great deal of assessment of risk to the child. The intention to build family support work on the principles of new Community Schools has been eroded and the opportunity for early intervention and more service integration is being lost'.*

(Respondent 4, Fieldnotes)

It is not surprising that people cannot tell us what contribution family support work has made when we know that there is no agreement in the role, a lack of understanding of the activities family support workers undertake and no quality assurance process.

### **Question Five: 'How Do You See Family Support Work developing Over the Next Five Years?**

The respondents here were clearly divided between seeing a role for family support work and the role that social work might take in the next five years. The lack of consistency between respondents regarding family support work and integrated children's services raises concern for the stability and future provision within Pentesk Council. The authorities' vision for integrated children's services did not appear to be shared across the respondents, between services, across management, or within services. Four respondents felt that there needed to be a review of both the role of family support work (respondents 1, 4, 5, 9) and the strategy for children's services (respondents, 1, 3, 5). Improving retention and creating a progression pathway was mentioned by respondents (2, 4, 9, and 12). Respondents (3 and 12) mentioned clarifying the boundary between social work and family support work. Whilst two respondents (7, 8) indicated that they did not know how family support work might develop over the next five years. Respondents six and twelve had very strong views on how they saw support for families developing over the next five years and they promoted the idea of the family support worker as a 'para-professional'.

## **Family Support Work as Para-professional**

*'I think that we will see children's services delivery carved up through organisations providing specialist services and resources. Social work will be the statutory service providing a gate-keeping role to these services'*

(Respondent 6, Fieldnotes)

*'Social Work services will be reduced to assessment and referral of cases to other agencies and holding a tiny group of child protection cases. They will abdicate responsibility to police, health visitors and crucially family support work. Twenty First Century Social Work Report indicated that other services need to accept the role of 'Corporate Parent'. We need to engage in that discussion to ensure that family support work does not turn into para-social work'*

(Respondent 12, Fieldnotes)

Whilst these two respondents appeared to have fairly strong views, others indicated that family support work would continue and could be a profession in itself. They indicated that it would need to be a more cohesive role providing a 'needs' led service to children and families.

## **Cohesive Role**

*I think that family support work needs to get bigger so that we can create a cohesive role and make it more attractive. We also need to clarify the boundary between the role of family support work and social work and have a definitive role for each'*

(Respondent 3, Fieldnotes)

## **Needs Led Service**

*'The authority has a mammoth task ahead refocusing social work services and family support work will play a big part in this. We need a strategy, which will include the views and aspirations of parents and carers. It must become a needs led service, which supports children and families'.*

(Respondent, 5, Fieldnotes)

This question has discussed how this group of respondents see the development of family support work over the next five years and it elicited strong views from staff involved in children's services. These quotations highlight many of the difficulties within the authority and the tension between professionals involved in children's services within Pentesk Council. It demonstrates that there was no single position held by the respondents and it may be difficult to establish a coherent role for family support work. The role of family support work as a refocusing of welfare services and what that may involve for the development of the family support worker will be discussed further in chapter five and in chapter six I discuss whether family support work is a 'para-profession' or part of an 'emergent profession' in modernised children's services delivery.

## **Summary**

This appendix has discussed the exploration of the data for 'First order' principles i.e. what were the respondents saying in relation to the questions (Knight 2002; Munn, 2006). What I have shown here is that there appeared to be a diverse range of views between the eleven respondents of what family support work is within the context of the local authority and that these views were not necessarily shared between each profession or indeed between the differing layers of management taking part. I have shown the reader that what has been written is each individuals representation of their 'truth' how they view things in their working lives and in their own words (Ball, in Ozga, 2000).

The eleven respondents in this study described family support work as being; a service; an approach; a process etc. The respondents also talked about their understanding of what was being delivered under the heading of family support work. This included; assessment, report writing; casework; individual work; family work; parenting work; practical assistance in the home; working in partnership with other agencies and developing programmes across the authority.



Appendix 4

(A) What is Family Support Work within the context of the Local Authority?

Respondent	Service	Approach	Statutory	Non-statutory	Preventative	Universal	Early Intervention	Not Sur
1	✓				✓	✓		
2	✓						✓	
3	✓							✓
4	✓	✓		✓				
5							✓	
6	✓		✓					
7		✓						
8								✓
9	✓						✓	
10	✓							
11								
12	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	

(B) What Activities do Family Support Work Undertake?

Respondent	Key Message
1	We need to get the balance between individual and programme work but at present there is no s either at L.A. level or indeed within the wider stakeholder context.
2	FSW undertake practical work around issues such as housing, behaviour support and pointing fa supports through the assessment process... FSW are dealing with multiple complex issues, rather that the FSW helps make and support connections to single agency support.
3	FSW falls under 3 categories: Individual work with children & families, capacity building and wor therapeutic work with children, relationship building, parenting work, assessment attendance at planning meetings. Joint working with other services etc.
4	Requests for FSW involvement comes from professional perspective where a range of profession

	assessment or for distinct work of a practical nature. It can include advice in areas such as debt, h
	groups. It can also lead to more therapeutic integrative approaches such as anger management, a
	families maintain a balance in order that a child grows and develops in adverse conditions.
5	The main work that FSW's undertake is an assessment to see what the issues are. From this there
	addressing issues such as practical support i.e. helping with rent arrears or housing issues, helpin
	behaviour or from the assessment directing the family to appropriate supports.

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